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CAROLINA christian

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of Christ
BUILDING FAITH, FAMILY & FRIENDSHIP

CAROLINA christian

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Editorial:

The Witnessing Church

Dennis Conner

I believe the theme of the book of Acts can be found in the last line of Jesus' parting statement to the apostles in Acts 1:8, "...and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." It is fascinating, and more than coincidental, to note that the remainder of Luke's story of the early church unfolds in precisely that order. Christ is borne witness to first in Jerusalem, then as a result of persecution Christ is preached in Samaria (Acts 8:5), and then subsequently the regions beyond. While Acts historically has been read and understood in a number of ways (i.e. church history, church pattern, Luke volume 2), it is altogether appropriate to read it as the story of the witnessing church. As we read Acts from this perspective, it is instructive to note the essential characteristics of those earliest faith communities as they bore witness to the resurrected Christ.

First, the witness of the church in Acts was *empowered by the Holy Spirit.* As John Stott has noted, in Acts we see that "without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the lifegiver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness... without his fruit, no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead." As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and the Spirit has not left the church since. One He took up residence in the body of Christ, He never intended to leave. Whether folks are comfortable talking about it or not, the fact remains that the effective power of the church's ministry and witness today is the Holy Spirit. He is still present and active as He convicts of sin, transforms lives, enables believers to put to death the deeds of the body, and imparts life.

In Acts the Spirit empowered the church's evangelistic thrust: the preaching on Pentecost, Phillip's encounter with the eunuch, Paul's going to Rome, Peter's barrier–breaking witness to the household of Cornelius. Brethren may disagree about how the Spirit works today, but let no one deny that He *does* work today.

What does this mean for us today? It means, among other things, that we must humble ourselves before the authority of God's Spirit. It means that we must determine not to quench Him by the denial of His presence and we must not grieve Him by wrong attitudes and behaviors. And like the Jerusalem church, it means that we must manifest the marks of the Spirit's presence in the church: biblical teaching, loving fellowship, vital worship, powerful prayer, and on-going evangelism.

Second, the witness of the church *was expressed in life-style evangelism*. Sharing Christ and His salvation was not a matter of programs in Acts, but of lifestyle. In Acts 7 Stephen unflinchingly proclaimed Christ to a hostile audience, risking his life. Then, in Acts 8:4 "those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." These were not folks who had just completed the latest personal work training class. They were simply convicted believers who were so full of Christ they just couldn't keep quiet. Then there was Paul and Silas, who found themselves witnessing to their fellow prisoners by praying and singing hymns even though their feet were fastened in stocks (Acts 16:15-16). For all of these believers bearing witness to Christ was the natural by–product of a life truly surrendered to Christ. It was not something they had to be guilt-manipulated into making time for; rather, it was part and parcel of who they were as disciples of Jesus.

The third characteristic of the witnessing church in Acts was *Christ–centered proclamation.*Sermons are a dominant feature in Luke's story. There is Peter's sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-39), Peter's sermon on Solomon's Porch (Acts 3:12-26), Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:30-32), Stephen before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2-53), Paul in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:15-41), Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2-3) and Athens (Acts 17:22-31), and Paul before Agrippa (Acts 26:2-23), just to mention some of them.

There is a common theme in all these sermons—Jesus. Jesus Christ was the One of whom the prophets spoke, He was put to death, but God has raised Him from the dead. The death and resurrection of Christ was the bedrock of apostolic preaching, challenging us to examine and re–examine the focus of our preaching today.

What about our congregations today? Are they bickering churches, stagnating churches, declining churches, or witnessing churches? If we are serious about being the church of the New Testament, then we will strive to be a witnessing church.

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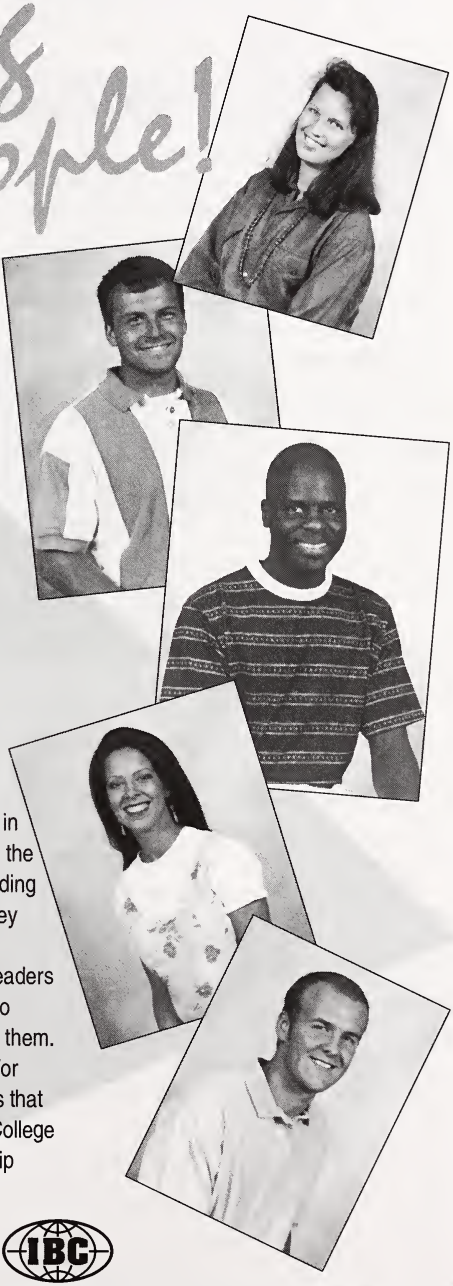

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Associate Editorial:

Tongues of Fire

Jim Mullican

A crew of several workmen labor for months to build a house. When completed it shelters a family and represents a sizeable investment on the part of that family. Then in just an hour or two, whether it is the result of deliberate arson or just an accident, fire can consume that house completely.

A forest may take fifty years or more to grow to its full size, but in just a matter of minutes a forest fire can sweep through and destroy it all. Again, the cause may be deliberate arson, or simply a careless person who threw down a burning cigarette, or another careless person who let a campfire get out of control.

> "Therefore, it is important that we who are Christians always think before we speak."

The same is also true of the church. A unified, loving and growing congregation which has been built up over many years by the work and service of many individual Christians may be destroyed, divided, and devastated by one or two who criticize, slander and spread gossip about their fellow Christians. James 3:5-6 tells us that the tongue is just like fire—consuming and destroying what has taken years to build up. Therefore, it is important that we who are Christians always think before we speak. Ephesians 4:29-32 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen…Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

A house or forest devastated by fire is a tragedy indeed, but a church or an individual Christian devastated by criticism and gossip is even more tragic. Perhaps it we would think about who it is we are talking about—members of God's own family—we will be less eager to say things we should not.

BYPASS SURGERY FOR DAVID PHARR

David Pharr, editor of *Carolina Christian* from 1988–1993, underwent quadruple heart bypass surgery on November 30, 1996. Our latest information as this is being written is that David is doing fine and should be back to work soon.

As most of our readers are aware, brother Pharr has a long association with the cause of Christ in the Carolinas. For twenty five years he served the Charlotte Ave. church of Christ in Rock Hill, South Carolina, before moving to Knoxville, Tennessee, to become Director of the East Tennessee School of Preaching. He is currently preaching for the church of Christ in Clinton, Tennessee.

Brother Pharr's home address is 2620 Shropshire Blvd., Powell, TN 37849. His e-mail address is pharrbks@ix.netcom.com. Our prayers are with David and his loving wife, Peggy, that God will bless him with good health and many more prosperous years in the preaching ministry.

Laurinburg Church of Christ

FREDDY PACE

For quite some time there had been a great need to establish a congregation in Scotland County and the town of Laurinburg in particular. There were already some members of the church living in the Laurinburg area, but they were driving to Rockingham to worship. We started out with three core families (a total of fourteen individuals in all) and began meeting in the home of one of the Christian families in July, 1995. Now, less than a year and a half later, that seed has grown into a healthy, young plant with recent additions from others states and four baptisms since we began. Our Sunday morning attendance now averages 40 (of which 17 are children). We have several "regular visitors" who are being convicted by the Spirit and are asking to learn more. Doors have truly been opened for us in Laurinburg.

With the increase in our numbers we needed more space and have recently leased a small commercial building in south Laurinburg at 11600 McColl Road (Highway 401 South). The building we have is truly a blessing to us at this time, but we know that we would be better stewards of the Lord's resources by building equity rather than by being burdened by a lease agreement. One of our action items at this time is to solicit support from other congregations that may be able to help support a seed church. Our mission field is immense here and we will trust in the Lord to guide us and care for our needs. We would truly appreciate any help sent our way, whether it be guidance form those experienced in dealing with new churches, visits, prayers, mission work for our county, and possibly even funds for the support of a building program and a full time preacher.

Our goals are high, yet we know that we must crawl before we walk, and walk before we run. We may still be small in number, but we are great in faith and excitement about the possibilities and opportunities for Christ that exist here.

The address for the Laurinburg church is P.O. Box 98, Laurinburg, NC 28353. The phone number for the church office is (910) 276-1379. Churches interested in helping this good work can contact Freddy Pace at (910) 582-4076.

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Looking Forward

Ron Newberry

The Masai are a nomadic tribe of Africans who live today much as they have for centuries. As with all people in every culture, they have also adopted some cultural traditions. One of those traditions is to burn their huts when they move the village. The reason is that they simply do not believe in the past. They also refuse to be photographed because there is then a record of the past.

> *"As we merge the old and new years together, let us select the huts in our lives which need to be burned."*

As we enter a new year, we may wish we could have that kind of disconnect with the past. After all, the apostle Paul once wrote that we are to forget the things of the past, "...straining toward what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13). However, the extremes to which the Masai takein forgetting the past is not quite what Paul had in mind. We do need to be selective in our ability to forget the past. There are some things which we would like to forget, yet they may be the very things which are most instructive for us in the year ahead. They may prevent us from making the same mistakes over and over again.

However, as important, instructive and foundational as the past may be, to live in the past would be a huge mistake. As we merge the old and new years together, let us select the huts in our lives which need to burned. Decide what needs to be kept from the past and what needs to be jettisoned.

Paul's point seems to be that we cannot let the mistakes and failures of the past mortgage our future. Learn from mistakes. Seek forgiveness of sins and failures. Resolve to do better in the future. And then realize that this is the future.

Ron Newberry preaches for the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He may be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

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The Graciousness of God

Peter Rode

Isaiah prophesied during the last half of the eighth century BC (ca. 740-700 BC), which was a turbulent time in history for the people of God with Assyria's power waning and Babylon's star on the rise. It was also during this time that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity. In all the political upheaval, Judah (the Southern Kingdom) felt threatened and needed some sort of assurance that they would not get swallowed up by the greater powers. However, instead of turning to God, they ran for cover to Egypt. That was the wrong thing to do! God was their God, and He was in control. Their actions demonstrated a total disregard for the Lord and clearly displayed their lack of faith in Him.

> "Our Egypt is our government, our armies, our bank balances, our businesses and careers, our wives and lovers, or wherever we try to find shelter from the troubles in this life."

In chapter 30 Isaiah delivered a stern message to Judah and told them that their actions would bring about shame and disgrace (30:1-5) because Egypt was an "unprofitable nation... utterly useless...Rahab the Do-Nothing" (30:6b-7). Their actions betrayed their feelings, which was an utter rejection of God and His message. The result was that their lives would collapse in a heap around them because of their sin (30:12-14). Yet remarkably, through all this, God did not utterly reject them. The people of Judah might have felt safe with Egypt, but God had something else in mind. "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength... (v. 15). And God told them that even in the middle of all this upheaval and frantic activity, He is there waiting for His people to turn to Him for rest. In verses 18-19 we find this poignant affirmation, "...the Lord longs to be gracious to you, he rises to show you compassion...How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you."

Times don't seem to have changed. We are just like those people of old. They wanted to work things out by themselves—or with the help of others—instead of turning to God. And we want to do the same thing. Our Egypt is our government, our armies, our bank balances, our businesses and careers, our wives and lovers, or wherever we try to find shelter from the troubles in this life. It is only when things get desperate and out of hand that we then turn to Him. Yet, in the meantime God is waiting. We reject Him, but still He is waiting. We push Him away, but He stands with outstretched arms. We think our salvation is in things, He sees it in Christ.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Let's learn from Scripture and take Christ's advice. Instead of trying to do things on our own, let's turn to the gracious God who is always standing with outstretched arms beckoning to us.

Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

The Twenty-Third Annual Lectureship

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James L. Meadows — Lectureship Director
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Lectureship Schedule

Sunday

10:00 a.m.	Introduction to Exodus	**Furman Kearley**
11:00 a.m.	King that Knew not Joseph	**Edwin Jones**
1:30 p.m.	Moses in the "University of Egypt"	**Bill Nicks**
7:00 p.m.	Singing	**Wiley R Baker**
7:30 p.m.	Joshua - From Youth Until Death for Jehovah	**B.J. Clarke**

Monday

8:00 a.m.	Moses' Excuses, Excuses	**Hardeman Nichols**
8:40 a.m.	Who is Jehovah	**Stephen Law**
9:30 a.m.	The Covenant God	**Steven Eddy**
	Class: Types and Shadows	**Winfred Clark**
10:30 a.m.	Jehovah and the gods of Egypt	**Jack Williams**
	Ladies: Faith--Hebrew Midwives	**Lana Williams**
11:20 a.m.	The Passover and Feast Of the Unleavened Bread	**William Woodson**
2:00 p.m.	God Led Them	**Charles Brown**
2:50 p.m.	Stand Still and See	**Jim Dearman**
3:40 p.m.	The Sin of Murmuring	**Bobby Liddell**
7:00 p.m.	Singing	**Mark Aites**
7:30 p.m.	Moses: By Faith	**Michael Wilk**
7:45 p.m.	When I See the Blood	**Hardeman Nichols**

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Exodus

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Lectureship Schedule

Tuesday

8:00 a.m.	Pharaoh's Compromises	**Hardeman Nichols**
8:40 a.m.	The Provisions & Protection of God	**Dub McClish**
9:30 a.m.	In-Law Interference	**Mike Justice**
	Class: Types and Shadows	**Winfred Clark**
10:30 a.m.	Preparation for Sinai	**Ed Dyche**
	Ladies: Leadership–Miriam	**Irene Taylor**
11:20 a.m.	The Ten Words	**Robert Taylor**
2:00 p.m.	The Book of the Covenant: Worship	**Lonnie Smith**
2:50 p.m.	The Book of the Covenant: Rights of Persons	**Dwight Fuqua**
3:40 p.m.	The Book of the Covenant: Property Rights	**Bruce Tucker**
7:00 p.m.	Singing	**Ken Forrest**
7:30 p.m.	Moses: Leadership	**Kenny Traylor**
7:45 p.m.	According to the Pattern	**Frank McElveen**

Wednesday

8:00 a.m.	Pharaoh's Heart	**Hardeman Nichols**
8:40 a.m.	The Book of the Covenant: Various Laws	**Bob Pritchard**
9:30 a.m.	The Words of Jehovah	**George Carlisle**
	Class: Types and Shadows	**Winfred Clark**
10:30 a.m.	The Tabernacle	**Van Ingram**
	Ladies: Love–Jochebed	**Gloria Ingram**
11:20 a.m.	The Priesthood	**Bob Cowles**
2:00 p.m.	Atonement & Cleansing	**David South**
2:50 p.m.	Faithful Workers	**James Rogers**
3:40 p.m.	Go UP To Canaan	**Randall Jernigan**
7:00 p.m.	Singing	**Jim Steels**
7:30 p.m.	Moses: Finishing the Course	**Ryan Chapman**
7:45 p.m.	Sin in the Camp	**James Meadows**

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Giving Everything to God

Stephen J. Walls Mathis

More than two thousand years ago, a generation before the birth of Jesus, a small and devoted family of Jews led their people to victory over Syrian rule. When the Maccabees and their followers returned to the city of Jerusalem, the city they had reclaimed, they found it in disrepair, the temple of the Lord in ruins. Putting their trust in God, they began the process of rebuilding and rededication. When it came time to light the menorah candles, they once again had cause for doubts and tears. They had only enough oil for one night. "Light it anyway," their leader suggested. "We will celebrate our rededication as long as the oil lasts. God will provide."

And He did. For eight days that one day's supply of oil kept the candles lit. The faith was rewarded, the work was blessed. And that was the beginning of the festival called Hanukkah. A festival of dependence.

We often try to overlook the consistent call in the Bible to depend on God. Our culture preaches self–reliance, independence above all else, ignorant liberty, self–indulgent freedom. And the message is tempting. So tempting that we often "baptize" it, in a sense. We fit the Biblical text to the message of independence we already believe. We forget the limitation that are in place. We forget that we can't do it on our own. We forget who owns our life. And in the name of Jesus, we make ourselves God.

That's the background to a short story in Mark 12, a story about a widow and her small but bold gift. All my life I have heard this told as a story of attitude. The widow is portrayed as a humble, gracious giver, and the rich who give are painted as devious, egotistical hypocrites who are only giving in order to be well thought of. But that's not it. As far as the message about being humble and gracious in our giving, that's fine. That's what God expects. But that's not the message of Mark.

We tell it that way because that's an easy lesson to hear and (for most of us) to apply to our lives. After all, how hard is it to accept that God wants us to give to Him with a right heart and a proper motivation? We tell it that way because the real message scares us; because the real message here threatens the life that we've grown comfortable with; because the real message calls for repentance and radical change. If there had been something wrong with the gifts of the rich that day, or something wrong with their attitudes, Jesus would have addressed them and would have challenged them on the spot. For all we know, their motives were pure.

Here comes the punch line. This is a story of dependence.

> "He doesn't praise the amount, nor does He praise her attitude. He praises the simple, steadfast, unwavering dependence on God."

The widow puts into the treasury all that she has. Nothing is held back. She gives it all to God. She depends. And Jesus notices. He praises her gift. He doesn't praise the amount, nor does He praise her attitude. He praises the simple, steadfast, unwavering dependence on God.

"All that she had."

She knew what we don't want to know—all that we have really belongs to God. The widow believed what we struggle to believe… *God will provide.* Those words fall on deaf ears as we, who really are rich, struggle and strive to provide for ourselves. We pass by the treasury, we put in our large sums, and all the while miss the blessing that comes from giving up all that we have.

Stephen J. Walls Mathis is a teacher in Charlotte, NC, and is actively involved with the North Charlotte church of Christ. He may be contacted at 7709-A Old Concord Rd., Charlotte, NC 28213.

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

APEX, NC… The sisters of the Apex church of Christ will be hosting their fourth annual Ladies Day on February 22, 1997. The featured speaker will be Dietlinde Spears, who lived as a child in Nazi Germany and then in Comunist Poland. She escaped to West Germany, was converted to Christ and is now married to an American citizen. She has written two books about her experiences and has told here story in serveral countries. Sister Spears and her family worship with the Crieve Hall church in Nashville. The theme for the program will be "God'sHeavenly Garden." For more information contact Carmen Revels at (919) 550-1740.

MOCKSVILLE, NC… Carolina Bible Camp now has its own homepage on the Internet. It can be accessed at http://users.aol.com/cbiblecamp/cbchome.htm. The dates for this year's encampment are June 15–July 26.

WASHINGTON, NC… The River Road congregation is in the process of searching for a new preacher to work with them. The church is able to provide partial financial support. Interested parties should contact Wayne Cox at (919) 946-2732, or write the church at P.O. Box 834, Washington, NC 27889.

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Advice For Lame Duck Preachers

PAUL JARRETT

Each election year produces a number of "lame duck" legislators (elected officials who have lost their bid for re–election). The lame duck designation refers to the time they have left to serve in office between the date of their election defeat and the time at which the newly elected officials take their place.

While preachers are not elected to office, any man who preaches for very long is probably going to experience a lame duck period in ministry. This occurs when either by his own choice or by the choice of the church a preacher leaves one work to go to another. The time between the decision to relocate and the actual relocation is what I am referring to as the lame duck period of ministry.

Sometime between now and this coming August I will conclude my work with the Archdale church. This is the fifth time in over 28 years of full–time ministry that I have experienced a period of lame duck ministry. Three of those occasions have been by my choice and two by the choice of the church leadership. It is my experience that whether it is the preacher's choice or the choice of the church to make a change, this period in one's ministry brings with it some unique challenges. With that thought in mind, I would like to offer the following advice to lame duck preachers.

First, *guard your attitude.* This word of advice is of particular importance if the decision to change was not your own. Even if you are the one who decided to make a change, it can be tempting to fall victim to the praise of your supporters, or to take advantage of your approaching departure in order to lash out at your detractors. As servants of God's people, ministers must never lose sight of their obligation to always—in all circumstances and at all times—be an example in their conduct. God's blessing is always on the peacemaker and His anger is always directed towards those who sow seeds of discord.

Second, *remember whose servant you are.* It will help us to maintain a good attitude if we bear in mind at all times that we are God's servants. As His servants we can look to Him for protection and guidance in every phase of our lives. As His servants our first duty is to be faithful. We do not seek to judge our ministries, nor should we fear the judgment others may pass on us. We trust that in all things God's will can and will be accomplished if we make it our aim to serve Him.

Third, *be constant in prayer.* In times of transition we must always hold to God's unchanging hand and encourage all around us to do the same. One way we do this is to be constant in prayer. We need to pray not just for ourselves, but for all who are being impacted by this change. We need to pray for the people and the work we are

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leaving behind as well as the new work to which we are going.

Fourth, *use this time to seek constructive closure.* It may be tempting, once a change is in theworks, to turn your attention to the new work into which you are about to enter. However, it is important that we recognize the significance of this time of closure. It can offer us opportunities for one final approach to those with whom we have been working in the hope of persuading them to obey the gospel. We especially need to be aware of those who are we weak and who may fall away when we leave. While no preacher should want people to follow him, the truth is that there are those who have come to lean on our support who may need special attention during this time of transition.

"IT IS NO COMPLIMENT TO ONE'S MINISTRY TO HAVE THE CHURCH FALL APART AFTER WE HAVE DEPARTED."

Fifth, *encourage all who are affected by this change to exhibit their devotion to Christ.* The greatest compliment that can be paid to any preacher is to see those whom he has influenced continue to follow Christ. By our example and the words we speak we need to place emphasis on the need to be devoted to Christ alone. The Lord's work is larger than that of any one of us. The church can prosper no matter who the preacher is if the focus is on Christ.

Sixth, *help prepare the church for the future.* As we conclude our work it is important that we do all we can to insure a better work will be done following our departure. We can use this time of transition to call attention to both the strengths and weaknesses of the church if we make it a point at all times to speak the truth in love. The real test of the work we have done comes after our departure. If the church moves forward, we can feel that we have played a part in its progress even after we are gone. It is no compliment to one's ministry to have the church fall apart after we have departed.

Finally, *as ministers we need to be aware of who is impacted most by this transition.* I am referring here to our families, our wives and children. It is essential for us to provide them with support and understanding. They need our strength, our direction, and our example to help them maintain a good attitude and accomplish a smooth transition. The welfare of our families should always be a chief concern.

I hope these words of advice from a lame duck preacher will prove helpful to my fellow preachers when they experience times of transition in their own ministries.

Paul Jarret can be contacted at 1824 Tamworth, Charlotte, NC 28210.

Seeing Things From Another Angle

Amos Allen

It was sometime in March of 1984 and the evening sky had been cloudy. During the night we heard the distinctive pitter–patter of rain on a dry, grass roof. The roof was not in good shape, but it had not mattered to the poor family we were staying with since there had not been any rain for five months.

We were sleeping on the floor of a mud hut after preaching in a community where we wanted to start a church. Staying overnight helped us learn the language and customs, and the relaxed evenings broke down barriers between us all. As the rain fell on— and through— the roof, we all woke up. I kept waiting to see how the holes would be plugged, but the Kenyans simply moved to drier spots in the room.

The next morning revealed a happy household. The rain signaled the end of the dry season, which was good news to a farming community. They even had a saying about visitors bringing a blessing of rain, but I didn't understand or care at that point. I thought the roof needed to be given more attention. Didn't they realize that a leaky roof is a serious thing?

More than once, while standing in the open air talking to a Kenyan, it would start to drizzle and I would begin to move toward shelter. I noticed that the Kenyans didn't share my haste. Unless it really came a downpour they would continue to stand there, enjoying the cool drops. I assumed they just didn't have the sense to come in out of the rain. Eventually, however, I learned to wait (and receive the blessing) with them and to move out of the way with them so the ground could get its share.

My view of rain had been that it was a "necessary evil." I even interpreted Jesus' words about good and bad people getting rained on as a negative thing (Matt. 5:45). After Kenya that changed. How many things do we see one way, but then start realizing that God sees it differently? What do most people say about giving and receiving, treatment of enemies, protection of rights, sickness, death and rules? What is their perspective?

Back in the early Spring a few months ago it rained one day for several hours. At times it pelted us with a vengeance, and then would relax into a steady shower. I watched it from a window and then from under a tree. I listened to it from my bed and then from the porch. It took me years to learn to enjoy, rather than despise, the rain.

I guess it will take a long time to appreciate the opportunity to give, to be thankful for God's rules, to rejoice when suffering and sickness strike, and to enjoy relinquishing rights on behalf of another. Maybe if we weren't so resistant we could change more quickly and gain the advantage of being like Christ and learning to see things the way He does. What if I had been taught from birth to welcome sickness for what it could teach me? What if persecution had been regarded as something to be expected rather than avoided at all costs? I know, it sounds extreme.

Thankfully, I now have enough sense not to rush in out of the rain. I can enjoy it like the farmer does. I do wonder, though, when I will have enough maturity not to run away from every other inconvenience or difficult situation?

There's a lot to be said for seeing things from another angle.

Amos Allen can be reached at 1755 Rocky Lane, Asheboro, NC 27203.

Real Evangelism

Joann Antonelli

When I think back to the time that I became a Christian in 1982, I recall that even though I did not truly believe in Christ or the Scriptures, there was still a part of me that wondered. What if there was something to it all? I believe the same thing is true of everyone else. Everybody, and I do mean everybody, has a part of them that wonders. And some of those people even begin to seek. When they do it is up to those of us who know Christ to give them an answer.

In our attempts to reach out and give an answer to those people (to evangelize), we must be careful that we do not send them the wrong message. People in the world want to know that there is hope and they watch you and me carefully. Sometimes, as they watch us, we try to portray perfection. We try to give the impression that we Christians don't have any problems, that we don't struggle with anything, and that we don't allow ourselves to get too close to the dirtiness of the world. However, if some of us have been trying to portray perfection in this way, we aren't helping the cause of Christ. In fact, I might even be so bold as to say that we are hindering it. You see, we are human beings and sooner or later those people who are watching us will see that we too are flawed and imperfect, regardless of the impression we try to give.

People in the world need two things from us. First, they need to know that we understand what it is like to be in the world and to be lost and that we have a message that really offers them hope. Second, they need for us to be real. They need for us to be real with our own struggles and then show compassion to them in theirs.

Last summer I heard a young man tell his story. He had grown up in the church and then gone astray when he became involved in a life of drugs and confusion. His story was about how he was led back to Christ. It was an encouraging and uplifting story for those of us in the audience who likewise had experienced Satan's power in being drawn away from God. This young man glorified God in his testimony by proclaiming Christ as the power that gave him strength to turn his life around. His testimony that night was not really about himself, but about the power of Jesus Christ. The impact of his courage to step out and acknowledge the sin that had been in his life and the hope Christ gave him was powerful. He was being real.

We all have our stories because we all sin. It is only in being real with ourselves that we allow others to see us. Christians aren't perfect people. Christians are people with an extraordinary Savior whose perfection is their salvation and hope. To try to give any other impression will be a stumblingblock to evangelism. Instead of being judgmental of sinners, we need to have mercy on them just as God has had mercy on us. Our imperfection does not allow us to take a holier than thou attitude with anyone.

Let's be real and honest with people about who we are, what we have been, and what we have become through the power of Christ. Let's tell them that if Christ can change us, then there is hope for them. Go into the world!

Joann Antonelli lives at 830 Magenta Dr., North, SC 28211.

The Problem of Suffering: Why Does God Allow It?

Wellington Smith

There is a question that is as old as the first tear and as recent as the latest newscast: "Why? Why does God allow suffering, sorrow, heartache and death, even among His own children?" This question was asked by Job and has been asked by every thoughtful person who believes in God who has ever walked upon the face of the earth. Not too long ago it was asked by a Christian man whose wife was involved in a terrible car wreck, receiving a broken arm, broken ribs, a broken back and pelvis, a broken leg and over two hundred fractures in her skull. She spent over a month in the Intensive Care Unit and required more than a year for a complete recovery.

After asking why, her husband received some encouraging answers from the word of God, and I would like to share them with you. My purpose here is not to determine the origin or cause of suffering, but rather to understand why God allows it and why Christians can even rejoice in the midst of it.

The first reason suggested by this Christian husband was that *suffering keeps the world from becoming too attractive*. The Bible tells us that we are "pilgrims" and "sojourners." This world is not truly our home. Instead, God has prepared something better for us. If there was no suffering, no one would desire the eternal home and make preparation for it. Suffering provides a background against which we can better appreciate the hope of heaven.

Second, *suffering can bring out our best.* This man whose wife was seriously injured was awitness to this. He saw it in the constant support of friends, the food that was provided, and the financial help he and his wife received to help with the bills. The best in people came out in response to the needs of this couple.

The same thing is demonstrated on a larger scale in times of natural disaster. We have witnessed time and time again how people have responded to the needs of those who have been victims of the floods in the Midwest, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc. Suffering brings out the best in people.

This may be one reason why early Christians rejoiced in their trials. The understood that tribulations could develop character. Paul wrote in Romans 5:3-4, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

Third, *suffering also provides an occasion for silencing the enemies of God.* Remember the story of Job? Satan wanted to prove God wrong about Job; that he only served God because God had blessed him and would not let anything evil happen to him. By the end of the book, however, Job's patience under the burden of suffering silenced Satan! Suffering can provide us with a stronger faith.

Likewise, God desires that we silence "foolish men." Writing to Christians who had suffered some and were about to experience an even greater suffering, Peter said, "For so is the will of God, that with well–doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men..." (I Peter 2:15). If there are those who have the wrong notion that we are Christians only for the good that we can get out of it, our patience and endurance in times of trial and pain will silence their doubtings and criticisms. It is under such circumstances that the value of being Christians really shines through. In the faith that sustains us in suffering and in the love we show towards others who suffer the critics are silenced and God is glorified.

Then, *suffering makes us more appreciative.* We all receive so many good things in this life and it is easy to take them for granted instead of receiving them with gratitude toward God. Suffering, on the other hand, helps us to appreciate more fully blessings such as good health, good friends, and a loving family. Paul's imprisonment helped him to appreciate even more his relationship with the Philippians (Phil. 1:7–8).

Fifth, *suffering makes us more aware of our dependence upon God.* Too often we think ourselves to be self-sufficient, but suffering has a way of reminding us just how little control over our lives we actually have. As my friend expressed, "But when a dozen of the most skilled men in their profession tell you they have done all they can and it is completely out of their hands, you suddenly realize how much you depend on God." At no other time are we more likely to realize that we depend upon God for our every breath!

As Paul proclaimed, "...in Him we live, and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

And another benefit of suffering is that it *helps purify us*. For instance, in 1 Peter 1:6-7 the apostle wrote, "Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness by manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ..." Like fire refines and purifies gold, so trials refine and purify our faith. Later Peter would add, "for he who has suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Pet. 4:1). In the same vein of thought, James counseled his readers, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith workethpatience" (James 1:2-3). James does not suggest that we are to be happy about the fact that we have trials; rather, we are to rejoice over that which is produced by our experience of trials. Spiritual maturing is developed through suffering.

To illustrate how this is true, my friend remarked, "Many times I searched my own life during these past six weeks in order to confess my every failure and shortcoming to God. I surely did not want my own sins to stand in the way of God hearing my prayers for (my wife). It was absolutely necessary to be truthful with God and myself, and I am a better man today than before."

In connection with this, *suffering enhances our prayers*. We all may be praying people. We pray at the right times and we pray for the right things. However, it is in the midst of suffering that we learn to pray earnestly, perseveringly and with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). Again, listen to my friend's experience, "I have been a praying man since I became a Christian, but never like this. I have learned more about prayer in the past six weeks than in the previous twenty years. My prayers will be different for the rest of my life."

Finally, *suffering helps us to be sympathetic*. To the church in Corinth Paul wrote, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). When we suffer and experience for ourselves the comforting power of God, we are then better able to share that same comfort with others in their affliction. When we have not known pain ourselves we may think we can sympathize with someone, but until we have actually been there personally there is no true understanding of their hurt. Experiencing suffering ourselves makes us more likely to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15) and better enables us to serve others.

So, can you begin to see now why a righteous and merciful God would allow suffering, even to the innocent? If we look at it strictly from man's perspective, we will not understand why suffering is permitted. However, remember what God said through the prophet Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9). When we look at suffering from God's perspective—from the viewpoint of His plans for us in preparation for eternity—then we can begin to appreciate why He would allow it to occur.

And finally, never forget those words of Paul which remind us of God's never failing love:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor live, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

May God be praised!

Wellington Smith, Jr., preaches for the Walkup Ave. church in Monroe, NC. He may be contacted at P. O. Box 2106, Monroe, NC 28110.

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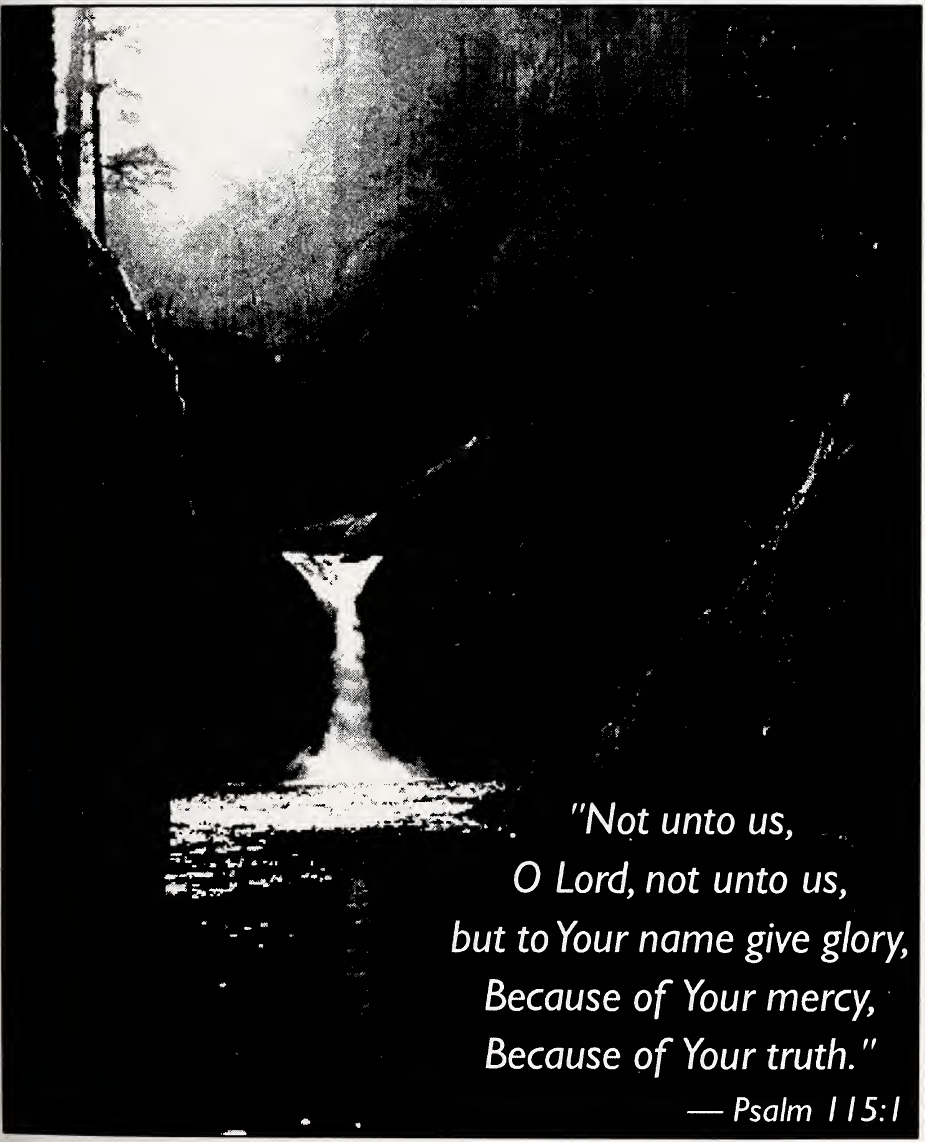

"Not unto us,
O Lord, not unto us,
but to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth."
— Psalm 115:1

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The God of Our Salvation

DENNIS CONNER

For some reason misunderstanding seems to be inherent to the teaching of God's grace. It began back in the first century, as evidenced in Paul's astonished question for the Roman church, "What, shall we sin that grace may abound?" Yet, for all the misunderstanding and wrangling that has taken place over the centuries, one truth remains unmistakably and foundationally true—our salvation begins with God. When we lose sight of that fundamental truth we immediately expose ourselves to the sin of pride and the illusion of merit. It is God who has taken the initiative in our salvation.

In Ephesians 2:4-7 (an ego humbling, God exalting passage of Scripture), Paul extols the attributes of God's nature that prompted Him to provide for our salvation in Jesus Christ. Each of these attributes is woven into the very fabric of the holy initiative. He writes, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The apostle uses three terms that emphasize the motivation of God in acting toward our redemption.

The first is *mercy,* which is God's compassion and pity for the helpless sinner. Human sin provokes the holy anger of God, as sin in its essence is a personal attack on the very nature of God. However, the Lord looks upon man himself with tender compassion and has pity for his otherwise hopeless situation. Thus, the anger and wrath of God for sin ultimately surrender to His holy compassion. As the prophet Micah reminded Israel, "He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities" (Micah 7:18b-19). Did you catch that? God "delights" in mercy—He would rather save than destroy. Compassion makes Him happier than condemnation.

The second motive is God's *love,* His disposition to see something precious and worthwhile in people in spite of their sin. The holy initiative is unmistakable in Paul's use of the word "because." It was *because* of love that God made us alive, raised us up, and made us to sit in the heavenly places in Christ. Yes, because of love and *in spite of* human sinfulness. In commenting on the greatness and abundance of the divine love, R. C. H. Lenski wrote, "It sees our deadness and is moved to bring us to life. This divine, infinite love will ever remain the most wondrous and glorious mystery which is too deep for full penetration by our finite minds...Let us fall down before Him and adore the glory of His love."

In another letter Paul would write, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). *While we were still sinners.* Even in our sin, God loved us. Even in our sin, He saw something worth saving. Indeed, the most natural response is to fall down before Him and adore the glory of His love.

And the third motive is *grace,* commonly defined as the unmerited or undeserved favor of God. To put it another way, grace is when God gives us not what we deserve, but what we need. The plain fact is that you and I and every other sinner deserved only one thing—death. God did not send Christ as a reward for our goodness, but as the means of rescue from our badness. And was God under any obligation whatsoever to do that? Absolutely none. Grace emphasizes the sourceof our salvation and deliverance and forever removes from us any and all grounds for boasting.

It is significant that the holy motives of God are set against the backdrop of man's sinfulness and its dreadful consequences, being wedged between two passages in which the Ephesians are reminded of what they were. On one side are verses 1-3, in which Paul paints a dark and despairing description of man in sin. The Ephesian believers are reminded of the time when they were "dead" because of sin. They are also reminded of who they once belonged to and lived for, "the prince of the power of the air" (Satan). They had been controlled by their fleshly passions and lust and were "children of wrath." On the other side are verses 11-12 in which the Ephesians are told, "therefore remember." They are not to forget that there once was a time when they were without Christ, without spiritual citizenship, without promise, without hope.

These descriptions of man in sin reek of death and helplessness, providing a black backdrop against which the purely selfless motivation of God is brilliantly illumined. Seeing ourselves as we were (and as many of us still are), it is all the more remarkable and humbling that God should do anything for us, much less save us.

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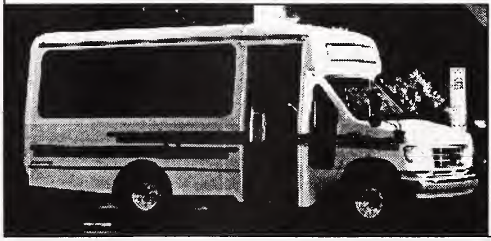

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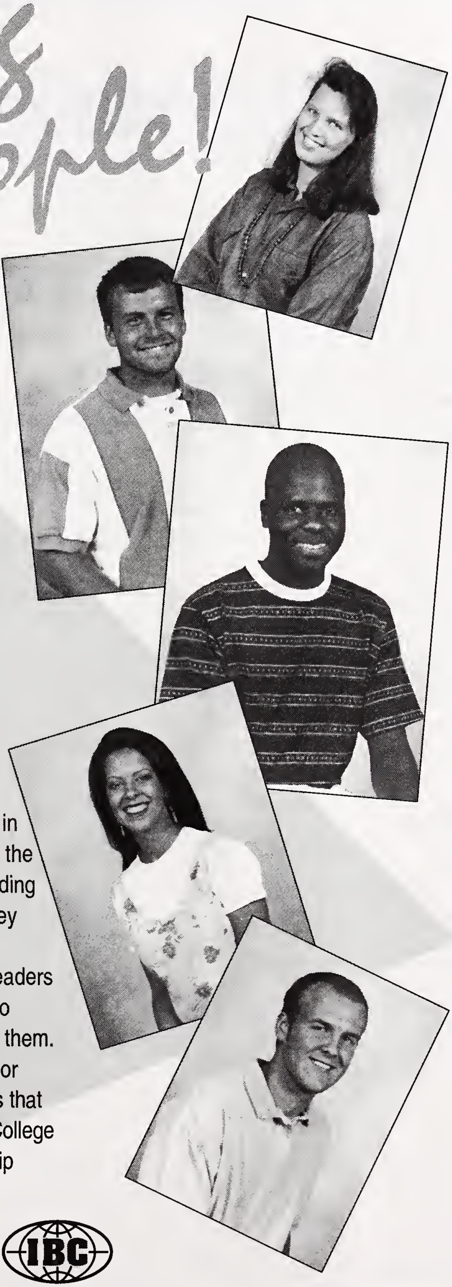

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Associate Editorial:

False Acusations

Jim Mullican

At the conclusion of the Beatitudes, Jesus said in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In spite of what Jesus said, it's very difficult to be happy when you become the target of false accusations. It hurts to know those whom you considered friends and even brothers and sisters in Christ will make unfounded accusations. We would prefer to believe that those who know us will not believe any such accusations, but human nature is such that some will.

Knowing these things, and perhaps having been the target of false accusations ourselves, we should be very careful in what we say. A reputation damaged by accusation and innuendo is very difficult to repair. Therefore, let us remember the following principles.

First, be absolutely sure of the facts before making an accusation against anyone. You could bemistaken. The principle of Ephesians 4:15, "speaking the truth in love," should guide us here.

Second, if you have made a false accusation against someone, even if years have passed, do whatever you can to rectify the situation. Confess (James 5:16a). Apologize. Be sure that all who heard the original slander also hear the correction.

Third, aim for a better attitude in the future. The attitude of I Thessalonians 5:11 would be a good one to aim for, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

And fourth, forgive those who make false accusations against you and do not seek to get even. As Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 5:15, "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else."

Jim Mullican also serves the Central Haywood church of Christ in Clyde, NC, as preacher and elder. He can be contacted at RR 4 Box 30-A, Clyde, NC 28721.

BAMBERG CHURCH STILL SHINING

In the last issue of *Carolina Christian* our church spotlight was placed on the Bamberg church of Christ in Bamberg, SC. Since then, the church has continued on in its revival and growth. Coy Crosby, the preacher, recently reported that in 1996 40 men and women were led to Christ through the church's various prison ministries, and two others were baptized locally. Thus, this small church, once on the brink of closing its doors, was used by God to bring 42 people to a saving knowledge of Christ in the past year. We praise God for His power and commend the Bamberg brethren for their energy and faithfulness to the Great Commission.

In this issue of *Carolina Christian* be sure to take the time to read about the ministry of the Brewer Rd. church in Winston–Salem, NC. This church serves as another illustration of the often surprising power and providence of God.

In a time when there is so much controversy and suspicion about in our fellowship, it is encouraging to find that there are congregations that are focused on sharing Christ and saving souls. May God continue to bless both of these congregations, and may the rest of us follow their lead.

Brewer Rd. Church of Christ

PHIL STAPP

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever–increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). This verse summarizes the desires and vision of the Brewer Road congregation. It is our goal to become more like Jesus each and every day.

This desire began in the mid 1960's when a small group of believers started a new congregation in downtown Winston–Salem, NC. Located in a store front on 4th Street, an active inner–city ministry was begun. By the mid 1970's there was a desire for a more permanent location. The current building on Brewer Road was opened in the fall of 1977. While the location has changed, the desire to minister to the hurting and needy has continued.

I arrived to be the pulpit minister in May of 1985 and found a congregation very different from any of which I had been a part. It was a diverse group both socially and economically. It was also a group willing to get involved in the lives of other. These characteristics have continued and even grown over the last twelve years. It is our desire to share the love of God with each other and our community.

God has used this desire to begin a very unique ministry. In the Spring of 1993, José Pelaez and his family first visited Brewer Road. They moved to Winston–Salem from Mount Pleasant, Texas and spoke little English. José asked if any congregations in the area had a Spanish speaking ministry. I told him no, but we could start one. The next Sunday he expressed the desire to teach a Spanish Bible class because he had several friends and relatives who were willing to come. Twenty–two attended our first Spanish Bible class the next week.

As the year continued we realized the great potential for ministry and evangelism to the large Spanish speaking population moving into the Winston–Salem area. We began to make long range plans and saw the need for a full-time Spanish speaking minister. In February of 1994, the congregation sent me to the ACU Lectureships with the purpose of

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Joe Cannon, Director; Highland St. Church of Christ
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finding out more about Spanish speaking ministry and finding candidates for the job.

While in Abilene I met Willie Costa. Willie is a native of Uruguay and was finishing his degree in Bible at ACU. We also made plans with Sam Gonzalez and the University Church of Christ for a Spanish speaking campaign that Summer. The campaign took place in July and resulted in 12baptisms. Willie began travelling to Winston–Salem two weeks every month in October. He and his family then moved to Winston-Salem in June of 1995.

The Spanish speaking ministry has continued to grow and has revitalized the entire congregation. Over the past three years the average attendance on Sunday mornings has grown from 65 to 115. This includes from 75 to 85 in the English speaking service and 30 to 40 in the Spanish speaking service.

A vital part of this ministry has been the great desire to show one another and the world that we are one in the Lord, no matter where we come from, how much money we have, or what language we speak. Consequently, every Sunday we begin our worship to God together. We sing several songs bi–lingually and then partake of the Lord's Supper together. All scripture readings and prayers are in English and Spanish. This has been a powerful draw to those in the Spanish speaking community. They have seen that we not only want to provide a space for them to have classes and to worship, but we also want to be one with them in Jesus Christ.

God has blessed us tremendously through this ministry and through so many other opportunities through which he has demonstrated his power. We look to the future seeking to be transformed more and more into his glory as we follow in the foot steps of Jesus. Our hopes and dreams are not based on our abilities, but on the power of God. "Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:4-6).

Phil Stapp can be contacted at 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston–Salem, NC 27127.

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Listen to the Singing of God

TIM SENSING

The prophet Zephaniah was active during the reign of King Josiah in Judah (Zeph. 1:1; 639-609 B.C.). Josiah had instituted a widespread religious reform based on the book of Deuteronomy in which all worship was centralized in Jerusalem. Pagan cults and priests were removed from the land. In the days of Zephaniah, the kingdom was in a horrible state of affairs before Josiah's reforms. Idol worship was mixed with true worship. Individuals would leave the house of God to pray to an idol on top of their roof. There was no shame in the land. The people were filled with pride and complacency. The religious leaders were evil, the officials were corrupt, the judges were crooked, the prophets were liars, and the priests were lawbreakers (Zeph. 3:1-4). They were bogged down in the very wrongs they presumed to correct.

> "In the midst of the joyful assembly, God responds in kind by rejoicing over His children."

WHERE IS FAITHFULNESS IN JERUSALEM? Jerusalem was the holy city of God where people should have worshiped God in truth and where the inhabitants should have cared for one another in love. Instead, they did not accept correction; they trusted in their own wealth and power. They neglected the needs of the poor, the lame, and the outcast. *Where is faithfulness in Jerusalem?*

The first two chapters of Zephaniah tell of God quickly coming in judgment. God will "sweep" away all that exists (Zeph. 2:2-3). All that was done in creation will be undone by the judgment of God. Zephaniah 2:4-15 gives illustration of God's judgment among others. The Day of the Lord had always been a triumph of Israel against other nations. God would lead them into triumphantbattle as the warrior general. However, the divine warrior who fought for Israel "on the Day of the Lord" against its enemies was now turning to bring wrath against unfaithful Judah as well.

"The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there" (Zeph. 1:14). Now the day of the Lord was a turn of events. The warrior God will come against Jerusalem. What a dreadful sound to hear the warrior cry of God. When He wages battle against a nation, who can stand? When God brings His judgment to a church, who will remain unpunished? When the Lord brings His discipline to an individual, who will be saved? Who can stand against the warrior? "That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements" (Zeph. 1:15-16).

WHERE IS FAITHFULNESS IN JERUSALEM? Zephaniah calls the people to "gather together...before" the coming day of the Lord so they will be swept away (Zeph. 2:1-2). "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath" (Zeph. 2:3).

WHERE IS FAITHFULNESS IN JERUSALEM? God Himself is faithful. He cannot disown Himself. He faileth not. "The Lord within it is righteous; he does no wrong. Every morning he renders his judgment, each dawn without fail" (Zeph. 3:5). God will gather His people and establish them in his grace. God's people will "seek refuge in the name of the Lord… They will pasture and lie down, and no one will make them afraid" (Zeph. 3:12-13).

WHERE IS FAITHFULNESS IN JERUSALEM? The prophet says there will be a remnant. God will put a protective fence around His people. God will be faithful to those who are His own.

> *Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel!*
> *Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem !*
> *The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,*
> *he has turned away our enemies.*
> *The king of Israel, the Lord is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.*
> *On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.*
>
> *The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory;*
> *he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love;*
> *he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.*
> *I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.*
>
> *I will deal with all your oppressors at that time.*
> *And I will save the lame and gather the outcast,*
> *and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.*
> *At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you;*
> *for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth,*
> *when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord. (Zeph. 3:14-20)*

WHERE IS FAITHFULNESS IN JERUSALEM? God will act on behalf of His people. God will restore the fallen. He will provide mercy to the distressed. God will gather home all who are scattered. No longer will God sweep away the unfaithful for Israel itself has been swept clean. God will rejoice over His people.

Zephaniah contrasts the cry of the warrior king against the unfaithful with the sound of God singing and rejoicing over His remnant (Zeph. 3:17). The prophet exhorts Jerusalem to sing praises to God aloud. In the midst of the joyful assembly, God responds in kind by rejoicing over His children.

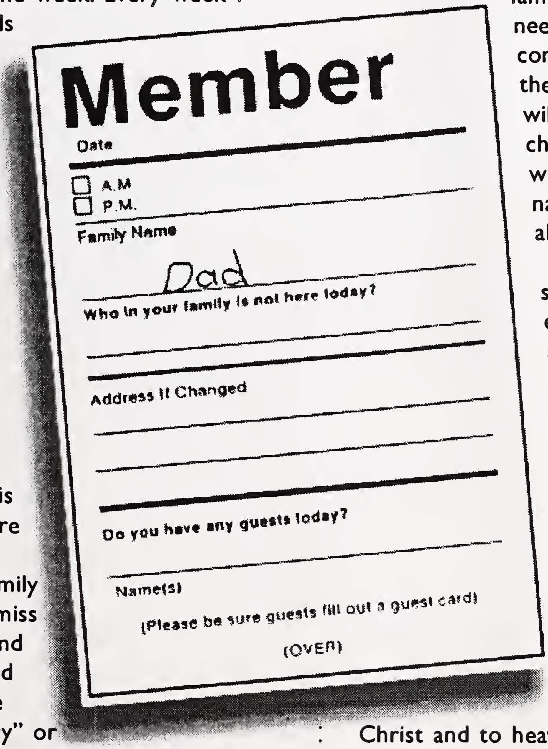
Can you imagine the singing voice of God? Who taught the angels of Hebrews 12 to rejoice in festive song? Who trained the angels to sing a new song in Revelation 4-5? Let us rejoice in our imitation of God. Let us take heart! God is present here and now. Let us all rest in God's faithfulness. Let us rejoice with Him who sings with His people. Maestro, please be seated as the Lord God of Zion quiets His people with His love! Listen to the singing of God.

Tim Sensing preaches for the Lexington Church of Christ at 649 Barr Rd., Lexington, SC 29072.

Missing Dads

Danny Boggs

I have deleted the family name that appeared on the attendance card reprinted on this page, but it represents one I found in the auditorium one week. Every week I discover cards with drawings of monsters or airplanes or people on them. I always get a laugh out of those and others that have funny, made–up names and requests written on them. But this one really tore at my heart.



Member

Date

☐ A.M

☐ P.M.

Family Name

Dad

Who in your family is not here today?

Address If Changed

Do you have any guests today?

Name(s)

(Please be sure guests fill out a guest card)

(OVER)

As the family of God, we miss each other and are concerned when a name such as "Larry" or "Cindy" shows up on the "Who in your family is not here today?" line on the attendance card. We wish that those people who are habitually absent from our assemblies knew how much our Lord cares for them, how much we care for them, and how our assemblies can contribute to the well–being of our souls (Heb. 10:24-25).

How much more sad and how much more far–reaching are the effects when the missing person is not just Cindy or Larry, but Mom or Dad to a child. Parents who don't make Christ Lord of their lives and who don't value the spiritual family He died to create need to seriously consider the impact they are making. What will happen to the child who grows up with Mom's or Dad's name always on the absentee line?

On a few occasions during Jesus' earthly ministry, adults hindered children from coming to Him. Jesus was indignant and said if the adults wished to enter the kingdom of heaven, they needed to imitate the children. Causing little ones to stumble on their way to Christ and to heaven is a grievous mistake (cf. Mark 10:13-16; Matt. 18: 1-5).

"Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him" (Psalm 127:3). Parents, please don't squander your heritage.

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville Church of Christ and may be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28739.

The Preacher Ken Doll

Preacher X

I've been thinking about developing a new line of Ken dolls. Right now plans are to call it Preacher Ken. It will be dressed in typical preacher's attire—frayed cuffs, worn shoes and an optional polyester suit. One of the standard accessories will be an old house (but not really his house) called Ken's parsonage. A key feature of the doll will be a face that has changeable expressions. These can be preset but generally will automatically cycle through the gamut of emotions. The smile, however, is optional.

This Ken will also come equipped with the Preacher's First Aid Kit, which contains a prayer cloth for wiping the eyes when the pain is too much to bear and a giant bottle of Advil for the frequent headaches and an even larger bottle of Pepto for the ulcers that never heal. He'll also have a crash helmet for those times when he beats his head against the wall. And there will be a "Do Not Disturb" sign for the office that everyone except God ignores.

One option that I'm leaning toward including is another group of figures called "Pew People." It would be recommended that you go ahead and buy them, because no one would understand Ken's situation without this flock. These will come in four groups.

The first group will be packaged in a bag labeled "Great Zeal But Little Knowledge." These figures are those folks who are always doing something or talking about someone, but usually doing or saying the wrong thing.

A second grouping will be labeled "Great Knowledge But Little Zeal." These are the folks who always know what should be done and who should do it, and that would be anybody but them. They always have the answers, but usually to the wrong questions.

The third group will be called "Those Who Don't Know and Don't Care." They'll be packaged in a larger bag.

And the fourth group will carry the label "Those Who Know and Who Care." They represent those good, and exceptional, folks who not only know God's will, but also do it. They will be gentle, caring and of a giving spirit. They will ask nothing in return for their kind deeds; they think only of the joy set before them. This will definitely be the smallest group and each figure will be personally signed by the manufacturer. These will be expensive because there will be so few of them, but without them Preacher Ken would fall apart. And the smile is standard.

So what do you think? Is this an idea that will sell, or will it be little more than something for light conversation? Odd. I meant for this to be funny, but for some reason I'm crying.

Preacher X is a respected, peace loving, committed servant of Christ and His church. Even so, he is not immune to the frustrations that all preachers in local churches inevitably experience, giving rise to this satirical piece.

> "Worship helps us find who we are and why God has placed us here on the earth. When we bow in God's presence with worship, only then are we made complete."
>
> (Judson Cornwall)

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

GHANA, WEST AFRICA... Correspondents are wanted to teach and study with a brother in Christ. His name and address are Joseph K. Morrison, Church of Christ, Box 41 Aiyinasi–Axim, Ghana, West Africa.

CHARLOTTE, NC... The Westside congregation announces that *Joseph Terry Wheeler* has come to Charlotte to work with the congregation. Brother Wheeler is a native of Georgia who earned his BA degree from Freed–Hardeman College. He began his full–time evangelistic work as an associate minister with the Central church of Christ in Spartanburg, SC, in 1976. He has also served the Duncan, SC, church of Christ for nine years and a congregation in Ann Arbor, MI, for eight and one half years. Terry has also conduct radio and campus ministries and coordinated seminars. He and his wife, Barbara, have three children and are no strangers to the Carolinas. It is good to have them back and working with us. May God's richest blessings be with them and the Westside church.

AIKEN, SC... The Whiskey Rd. congregation in Aiken is happy to announce that *Mark Hudson* has returned to the Carolinas to work with them. Mark previously had served the church in Morganton, NC, before moving to Delaware, OH. Mark reports that he is looking forward to seeing everyone at the Small Church Workshop in Yadkinville in May.

THOMASVILLE, NC... The elders of the Thomasville church of Christ would like to report that the church has dedicated 1997 to their youth and have planned several activities around that theme. They include monthly devotionals incorporating parental involvement, a youth week–end in February with *Jonathan Seamon* of David Lipscomb University, a summer intern from DLU, and special parenting classes. A youth focus that also centers around parental training and involvement is an effort that would bless any congregation. If you would like more information about implementing this kind of program in your congregation, you can contact the elders at 2209 Ball Rd., Thomasville, NC 27360. The elders are *Kirby Ball, Reid Davis,* and *Walter Staton.*

CHARLOTTE, NC... On the weekend of December 8, 1996, the Providence Rd. church of Christ dedicated its new building. It is an educational, fellowship, and multi–purpose facility. Their prayer is that the facility will be used for the growth and glory of the kingdom.

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Stick-to-itiveness

Peter Rode

Colonel George Washington Goethals, the man responsible for the completion of the Panama Canal, had big problems with the climate and the geography of the region. His biggest challenge, however, was the growing criticism back home from those who predicted that he would never finish the project.

On one occasion a colleague asked him, "Aren't you going to answer these critics?"

"In time," answered Goethals.

"When," his partner asked.

"When the canal is finished."

This story reminds me of a much older story. It is the story of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a leader of the Jews as they returned from Babylonian Exile. His mandate was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The story (Neh. 2-6) contains all sorts of threats and opposition from the enemies of the Jews. Nehemiah and the people were mocked and ridiculed (2:19; 4:1), plotted against and threatened (4:7), and distracted (4:2-9). Yet through it all, Nehemiah stood firm against the enemies of God's work. To add to his troubles he also had to contend with the discouragement of his own people (4:10) and internal corruption (5:1-13). However, Nehemiah was not a quitter. He saw the task through to the end and the wall was completed in 52 days (6:15).

How did he do it? Fortunately, Nehemiah gives us the secret to his "stick-to-itiveness" throughout the story. When mocked and ridiculed he answered his detractors, "The God of heaven will give us success" (2:20), prayed to God for deliverance (4:4), and set a guard and continued the work. He never gave up and would not allow the people to give up either. When they became discouraged Nehemiah told them, "Don't be afraid of them (the enemies). Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight..." (4:14). When internal corruption almost caused a rebellion, he rebuked the guilty parties (5:9-13). He simply refused to become distracted or sidetracked and continued to pray to God (6:3).

> "Nehemiah is a great example to us of what can be done by an individual who rests in the power of the Lord. With God all things are possible."

We Christians today have our own share of obstacles that we have to clear. Often we stumble and fall. Some pick themselves up and go on. Others stay lying where they have fallen. Discouraged, depressed, defeated. Nehemiah is a great example to us of what can be done by an individual who rests in the power of the Lord. With God all things are possible. Our mandate is to run the race and complete the course. Nothing—I repeat—nothing must be allowed to get in the way. Let's all today resolve to follow the example of Nehemiah, stick to the task before us, and finish the work of the Lord. Keep the faith!

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ and may be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

I'll Love You If

MARGARET CURTIS

Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

For a great part of my life I had never really read this verse. Oh, I may have had it in a Sunday School lesson, but I had never really comprehended it. I always thought that people would know I was a Christian by my knowledge, by my ability to always have the correct answer and never waver on even the most minute point. In this verse, however, Jesus reveals that there is a more genuine test of my discipleship to Him.

> "The people who were touched by Jesus' life did not repent so that He would love and accept them; rather, they repented because He showed them that He already did love them."

So many times in Jesus' ministry He reminded people that He had come to fulfill the old law and establish the new one. The old law was built on effort and accomplishment, of knowing everything to do and doing it perfectly. This was impossible. It is still impossible, but we still try to make ourselves worthy of salvation by our actions and deeds. That's human nature. We need tofeel that we have earned what we receive. As Christians, though, we must continually put aside our human nature and concentrate on our spiritual nature. The object of discipleship is to be more like the Christ, and the more I study Jesus, the more I see His love—unconditional love (unconditional in the sense that it was not based on the person's worthiness). In fact, when Jesus was preparing the apostles for His death, He said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15); and when asked by a Pharisee what the greatest of God's commandments was, Jesus replied, "To love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind, and that the second was like it, to love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 23:29).

In John 13:34 Jesus Himself said that He gave a new commandment, "that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." To love others as Jesus loves us? That is a pretty tall order! During His earthly ministry Jesus never put conditions on His love. He never said, "Change so that the Father can love you." The people who were touched by Jesus' life did not repent so that He would love and accept them; rather, they repented because He showed them that He already did love them.

It is so foreign to us just to simply love someone, whether they deserve it or not, because this is contrary to the ideas of the world and of human nature. Make no mistake about it, we are human and we are controlled so easily by our sinful human desires. However, the Christian has an advantage over those in the world. Jesus left with His disciples the Holy Spirit. When we have the Holy Spirit dwelling and working within us, we become more able to live and love like Jesus did.

Jesus loved no matter how a person looked or what he or she had done. Can we say the same thing about the way we love? I know that too often I can't. In the light of God's willingness to love me so much, and forgive me so much—just as I am, in my pitiful state of sin—it would be the height of arrogance for me to put conditions of love on anyone I meet, no matter how much I disapprove of how that person looks. Or what he does. Or what he believes. Yet, isn't that exactly what we do? So often we don't accept another into the fullness of fellowship unless he believes precisely as we do. And when we help someone, don't we often somewhere deep inside expect something in return? Then, when that doesn't happen, don't t we find ourselves thinking, "That's the last time I try to help them, if that's all the good it does"? But, brothers and sisters, how many times have we gone back to our Father, having done the same thing, over and over? Yet He treats us so differently than we treat others.

Someone might think, "But God can do that because He is supernatural." Yes He is, but if we are His children, we can be supernatural too in the sense that by His power we can act in ways that are not natural for the worldly man or woman.

I believe we have often hindered the growth of the body of Christ because of the strife that so easily takes place among Christians. If I were not a believer, and all that I saw among the people claiming to be of Christ was arguing and competition over things that matter more to them than to God, I would certainly feel no great attraction to become one of them. It thrills my heart, however, to see the spiritual revival that is taking place in the lives of many people today and it is my prayer that it continues to grow. I believe that if we strive to love one another as Jesus did, we cannot help but be blessed by God and draw those of the world to His church.

Jesus might have limited His ministry in this world to logical explanations of the truth about Himself. He could have been quite convincing with his logic and persuasive with His arguments, but He knew that intellectual understanding was not enough in itself to change lives for Heaven.He tried to teach that God not only wanted to take hold of our minds and intellect, but also of

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our hearts. How did He do this? By sending Jesus Christ to establish a fellowship of love in this world such as had never been seen before.

Of course, Christ wanted to touch the lives of as great a multitude of people as possible; He had a whole world to win. And with so much at stake He chose a method that was wholly contrary to what we would probably think to do. He chose a small group of twelve men with different backgrounds and lifestyles, and concentrated on making God's love real to them so that they could spread it throughout the world.

Just before Christ died He went to His Father in prayer, pleading for love and unity among His people as the ultimate proof of who He was and why He had come. He prayed, "that they all may be one, as You, Father are in me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21). Jesus knew that people would believe the gospel— that Christianity would make a difference in the world—only as sinners would be attracted to those who were living God's love in an unselfish, caring, superhuman fellowship.

Are you and I living in God's love today?

Margaret Curtis and her family worship with the South Fork church in Winston–Salem, NC. She can be contacted at 1612 Brookway West Dr., Lewisville, NC 27023.

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Carolina Christian Bookstore Has New Owner

After 45 years in the work force, the last five as owner and manager of Carolina Christian Bookstore (located in Yadkinville, NC), Dora Conner is "retiring." As of February 1, 1997, the bookstore's new owner will be Leslie Warner of Clemmons, North Carolina.

Having entertained a dream for many years of one day owning and operating a bookstore, sister Conner saw that dream realized in 1991 when she purchased the bookstore from Carolina Christian Publications. She states that the last five years have unquestionably been the most rewarding and enjoyable of her entire work experience, viewing the bookstore as more ministry than business. What will she miss? That question is easy—the people. After dealing with people in the secular job market for so many years, it has been refreshing to renewing to deal with Christians every day. People who deal with Carolina Christian Bookstore are not merely customers; they are friends. There are lots of folks who will bear witness to her optimistic attitude and pleasant spirit. A phone call to place an order typically became a conversation between friends.

And what will she do with her time now? Relaxing is not a top item on her retirement agenda. She will spend more time with her husband, Clyde, and looks forward to having more time to devote to other areas of ministry in the congregation where she worships, the Yadkinville church of Christ.

The new owner, Leslie Warner, is an active member of the South Fork church of Christ in Winston–Salem, North Carolina. She is the oldest daughter of the late Harmon Caldwell, who served churches in Clemmons, Durham, and Statesville during his preaching ministry. Sister Warner is married to Roger Warner (a deacon at South Fork) and has two children (Mark, who just recently finished a stint in the Army, and Melanie, a freshman at David Lipscomb University). She and her family live in Clemmons, North Carolina.

For the present time the bookstore will remain in Yadkinville with the address and toll free number remaining the same. Sister Warner will continue to take book displays to seminars, workshops, womens' programs and other events. If you would be interested in having her bring a display to an event at your congregation, just give her a call at 1-800-343-1081.

All of us here at *Carolina Christian* would like to congratulate sister Conner on here retirement and sister Warner on her new enterprise. For both of these wonderful Christian ladies we ask the Lord's richest blessings.

Congratulations!

What Are You Hearing?

STEPHEN J. WALLS MATHIS

Have you ever stopped to think about the messages you take in during a week? Every day our ears are bombarded by catchy jingles, our eyes mesmerized by so many flashy lights. Maybe, like me, you have caught yourself singing lyrics that you didn't even realize you knew, words you had never really thought about before. I remember singing "I'm a smoker, I'm a joker, I'm a midnight toker" (I had to ask my younger brother what a "midnight toker" was; come to find out it's not something I was consciously aspiring to be!)

> "What are we listening to? What message is being repeated over and over? That's the message we're learning!"

Repetition is an incredible teacher, maybe as influential as experience. Believe it or not, it's not an accident when you see the same commercial shown twice in a row on the same station. How else are we going to remember "I love you, man" so well? Those advertising agencies know exactly what they are doing!

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What are we listening to? What message is being repeated over and over? *That's* the message we're learning! So often, God's still, small voice is drowned out by the cry of "new and improved."

We need a better focus. We need better material to fill our eyes and ears, to fill our hearts and souls. Otherwise, we'll starve on this lifestyle junk food. We need to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

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What message does your mind repeat?

Stephen J. Walls Mathis worships with the North Charlotte church of Christ in Charlotte, NC. He can be contacted at 7709-A Old Concord Rd., Charlotte, NC 28213.

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Can You Trust Your Bible?

CAROLINA christian

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Theme Editorial:

Who Can You Trust These Days?

Jim Mullican

We live in an age of skepticism. We no longer trust our fellow man. Too many "good Samaritans" who picked up a hitch-hiker on the side of the road have ended up in the hospital or the cemetery as a result of their good deeds.

We no longer trust our government. Too much dishonesty, corruption, and effort to hide the truth have come to light. Too many campaign promises have been forgotten once the candidate has attained the office he or she sought.

We don't trust our military leaders. The facts concerning chemical exposure suffered by soldiers in Iraq are only the latest example of a military establishment seeking to hide the truth from the public.

A recent survey asked people what professions they trusted and which ones they trusted least. A fireman was trusted most, but even he scored 3.07 on a scale ranging from 0 to 4. Protestant minister was nineteenth, just below accountant and just above medical doctor. The President of the United States was thirty-fifth, just above a TV news anchor. A U.S. Senator was considered less trustworthy than a TV talk-show host. A Congressman was just below a car salesman, and a TV evangelist was less trusted than a prostitute but more trusted than a crime boss or drug pusher! Our money still bears the motto, "In God We Trust." He seems to be about the only One we can trust, and many do not even trust Him.

The Bible is God's revealed word, and it is only from the Bible that we learn God's will for us. The purpose of this issue is to demonstrate that we can trust the Bible. It has stood the test of time, and will stand the test of eternity as well. Frequently archaeological finds confirm something in the Bible or shed light on a difficult passage. The nature of inspiration, how God preserved the Bible throughout history, and human experiences which demonstrate that God always knows best are all covered in this issue. In a world where little can be trusted, it is reassuring to know that you *can* trust your Bible.

I would like to express my appreciation to the men who agreed to give up a day off and time they might have spent with their families to write the articles which appear in this issue. The churches in the Carolinas are fortunate to have such men working in the kingdom.

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What Is Inspiration?

Danny Boggs

The Bible is inspired by God. We call it "inspired" because its early English translators rendered the Greek word theopneustos "given by inspiration of God" in 2 Timothy 3:16.

Unfortunately, because we use the word "inspire" and its cognates in varied ways in modern English, many are confused about the meaning of the Bible's inspiration. When we say, "The Panthers played an inspiring game," "The beautiful mountains were the inspiration for my painting," or, "Max Lucado writes inspirational books," our usage of the word pales in comparison to the concept of biblical inspiration.

The New International Version and several other translations give us the literal meaning of theopneustos in 2 Timothy 3:16 as "God-breathed." All Scripture is God-breathed. The Bible is more than a collection of literature that gives us happy thoughts, makes us think about God or encourages us to do better. The Scriptures are the very words of God. Just as the heavens and stars were made "by the breath of His mouth" (Psalm 33:6, NIV), the Scriptures are the productof God's own breath. The inspiration of the Scriptures means that God so guided their writing by human authors that the words of the Bible are precisely what God wanted to communicate to mankind.

Many of the writing prophets and apostles explicitly claimed to say or write God's words under God's direction (e.g., Isaiah 8:11, Jeremiah 1:5-10, Ezekiel 3:4, 1 Corinthians 14:37, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Revelation 2:7). It is claimed that phrases such as "The Lord said" and "the word of the Lord came" are found more than 3800 times in the Old Testament alone (William Evans, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, p. 203).

Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the words of the Old Testament. He demonstrated to the Sadducees the reality of the resurrection of the dead by pointing to the precise construction of a clause spoken by God and recorded by Moses in Exodus 3:6, "But about the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:31-32).

Jesus relied on the Scriptures when tempted (Matthew 4). He believed the Bible's accounts of creation (Matthew 19:4-5), the flood (Luke 17:26-27), and Jonah being swallowed by a great fish (Matthew 12:39-41). His quotations ran the gamut of the Old Testament books and spoke to their authority. He told how the Scriptures spoke about Him (Luke 24:27). "It is written," "the Law," "the Word of God," and "the Scriptures" were interchangeable terms in our Lord's vocabulary (John 10:34-36). He knew the Old Testament was indeed God's Word.

Not only did Jesus endorse the Old Testament's inspiration, He also guaranteed the inspiration of the New Testament. God's plan for making the Good News of Jesus known to the world rested in the apostles. To accomplish this awesome task, God would provide the apostles the necessary guidance. In His early commission to them, Jesus said, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20).

In preparing the apostles for His departure, Jesus said, "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the

Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:25-26); "I have much more to say to you, more than you can bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:12-13).

The New Testament writers claimed, both for themselves and for each other, the guidance which Jesus promised. The Lord gave commands through the apostles (2 Peter 3:1-2). Paul wrote God's commands (1 Corinthians 14:37) and "according to the Lord's own word" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Peter equated Paul's writings with "the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). Paul quoted "Scripture" from both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 (1 Timothy 5:18). These are claims for inspiration, for nowhere in the New Testament is the word "Scripture" used for uninspired and unauthoritative writings.

While the Bible emphasizes the fact of its inspiration, it leaves the mechanism a subtle mystery. The closest the Bible comes to explaining how God gave us inspired Scriptures is Peter's reference to God's communication through the Old Testament prophets. "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21). When prompted by the Spirit, biblical writers penned the words God desired to be written to the needs at hand.

Inspiration served God's specific purpose of guaranteeing the infallible communication of His will. It was not a magic wand for the

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biblical author's personal use. Paul couldn't remember how many he baptized in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:16), he could not see into his own future (Acts 21:8-14), nor could he heal himself (2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Galatians 4:14). Inspiration certainly did not make the biblical writers sinless. Paul withstood Peter to the face for his wrongdoing (Galatians 2:11ff.) and admitted his own struggles with sin while writing inspired letters (1 Timothy 1:15, Romans 7:7-25).

Inspiration did not eliminate research on the part of the biblical authors (Luke 1:1-4). Inspiration did not suppress the human emotions or needs of the writers. Jeremiah wept, and Paul expressed joy, sarcasm, loneliness and a host of other powerful feelings.

When we read the books of the Bible, though the words are the words of God, we hear a difference between God's voice through Moses and God's voice through David, Isaiah, Luke, Paul or John. God guided the writers to use the words and styles with which they were familiar in communicating His message, yet those very words were the way God wanted the message expressed.

If God had waited until the twentieth century to send Jesus into the world and until the 1990s to inspire the New Testament, He could have used anyone He wanted to write the books. Had Jeff Foxworthy and William Buckley been apostles and Christians, God could have chosen Foxworthy to pen the epistle to the Mississippians and Buckley to write the letter to the churches of New England. Foxworthy's would be written with Foxworthy's style and vocabulary and Buckley's with Buckley's. Still, neither epistle would leave a doubt as to God being its ultimate originator.

> "A book written by some forty authors over 1600 years with such unity, accuracy, amazingly fulfilled prophecy, unparalleled message and abiding power must be from God!"

Many of the fundamental truths of God's nature and dealings with man are incomprehensible to us. How did God create the world from nothing? How can the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all be the one God? How did the Spirit cause Christ to be conceived in the womb of Mary without the agency of a man? Our inability to understand God's nature and actions does not make it unreasonable to believe that God is who He says He is and does what He says He does (Hebrews 11:3). "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).

How did God inspire the Scriptures? We don't know. But we know that the Bible is inspired. A book written by some forty authors over 1600 years with such unity, accuracy, amazingly fulfilled prophecy, unparalleled message and abiding power must be from God!

Without a revelation in words from God, we could never know the paramount necessities of life (1 Corinthians 2:9-13). Because the Scriptures are inspired they are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. They can teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us in righteousness, that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Inspiration means you can trust your Bible, because it is the very Word of the God who is always trustworthy (Romans 3:4)!

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville Church of Christ and may be contacted at 1975 Haywood Road, Hendersonville, NC 28791.

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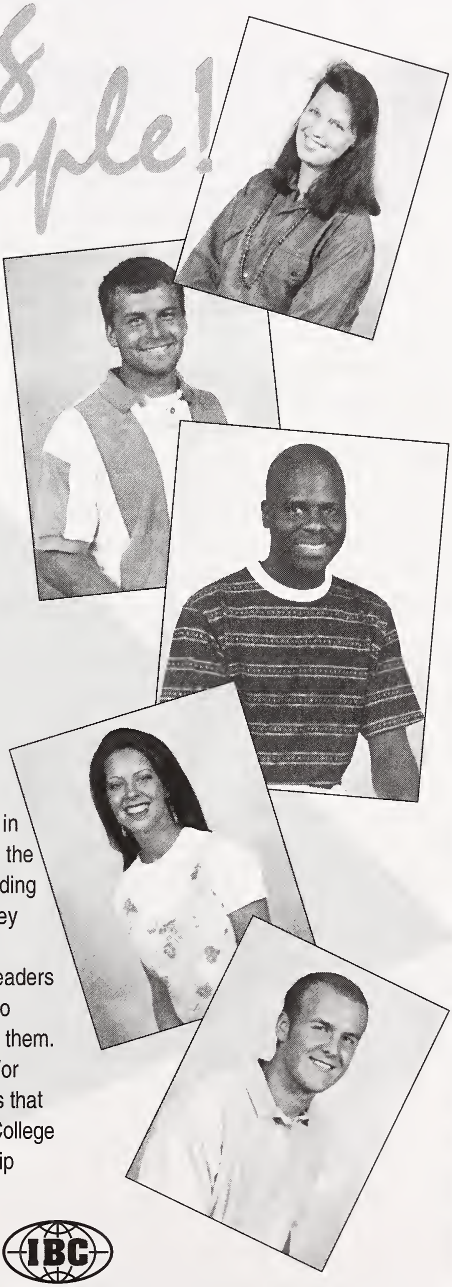

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How the Bible Came to Us

VERNON DUGGER

to hear God speak to the world, and to watch Him perform miraculous deeds are things I do not want to miss. I often dream of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, taunting the priests of Baal. Then with humble words he called on the name of the Lord and the fire of heaven was unleashed toconsume the offering. The looks on the faces of the priests of Baal--what a sight it must have been! I wish I could have seen the Lord spitting on the ground and rubbing it in the eyes of a man born blind. I wish I could have heard the discussion of the apostles, and then to have witnessed the blindness leave the eyes and to see them filled with the wonder and awe of the Savior. How is it that I have not missed the world-changing event of Christ, the Son of God, coming into the world? Of course I have not missed the mighty acts of God because I have the Bible. Yet recently when I asked a group of students how the Bible came into existence, I was met by blank stares. It dawned on me that some of us, who are Christians, never have asked the questions concerning how the Bible was put together. Some believe the Bible is the word of God because people they trust told them. Others have asked very trying questions concerning how the Bible was transmitted and if the methods were reliable. As Christians these issues should be important to us. God is speaking to the world and it is an important event.

Explaining the origins of Scripture and how it was transmitted is a task that would take more time than I have and would also fall outside of my qualifications. However, I can give a short overview with the purpose of leaving more questions than answers. My hope is that after reading this article, many will desire to search and learn more. I have chosen to concentrate my efforts on the New Testament because most of us are more familiar with it. By reviewing the primary stages in the development of the New Testament, attempting to answer questions about why the New Testament was put together, and finally discussing the criteria that seemed to be most important in the decisions to preserve these documents, I hope to whet your appetite for further study.

The New Testament had several relevant stages of development. The first, of course, came in the message spoken by the Lord Himself. Christ spent a great deal of His ministry speaking and teaching to large and small crowds. The words were not always understood by the apostles, but later the message became clear. In John 14:26, Jesus tells His apostles that they will be taught directly by the coming Holy Spirit and will be reminded of the things that Christ has taught them. The New Testament begins with the words of Christ.

In the early church, Scripture was the Old Testament. But the writings of the apostles were also held as authoritative. In the beginning of the church of Christ, the Old Testament was used to teach people about the Master. Philip, in Acts 6, speaks to the Ethiopian about the message of Christ, beginning with a passage from Isaiah. Peter speaks of Paul's letters as authoritative in 2 Peter 3:16. It is clear that from the onset of the church the apostles were enabled by God to remember the things that were needed to pass on the message of Christ. They used the Old Testament and the writing of the other apostles for teaching.

As the church grew, the apostles began to die and the church was facing false teaching. Paul saw this coming and charged the leaders of the church to hold to the "deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (I Timothy 3:9, NIV). Titus was also reminded that the elders were to "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). With the passing of the apostles the men charged with keeping sound doctrine alive began to collect the writings of Paul (Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, p. 109). About fifty years after the death of John, possibly the last living apostle, Justin Martyr, a convert to Christianity who became an early apologist, described Christian worship and the reason for taking the Lord's Supper. Justin Martyr tells us, "the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them which are called gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined to them" (Justin Martyr, "First Apology," in *A New Eusebius*, p. 67). If Justin is right, by A.D. 150 or earlier, the church already had a collection of books that it used for a pattern of teaching. As Justin mentions,these memoirs of the apostles were called Gospels. After the development of the Pauline Corpus, the Gospels were soon

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collected. By the end of the second century we have a list of documents that looks much like the list we have today (Neil Lightfoot, *How We Got the Bible*, p. 112).

It is clear that the development of New Testament Scripture began with the words of Christ and continued with the apostles. They then passed the message in words and writing to those to whom they gave the responsibility for keeping the Word of God. This process was very important because the early church was facing many false teachers (W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, pp. 250-251). The early church agreed on a set of writings that reflected the apostles' teaching.

I believe it important to remember that there was not a group of people that sat down to decide on what should be in scripture and what should not. The teaching in the church was alive and well and in the hands of the apostles after Christ and those to whom the apostles gave the charge to keep the Word. It was this teaching that was reflected in the writing of these books. It was the teaching of Christ and the apostles that gave rise to the content of scripture. The councils of the early church did not create Scripture, but only confirmed it after it existed (W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, pp. 250-251).

There are many manuscripts and situations that are not touched on in this article. Let me encourage you to do further study in this area. Dr. Neil Lightfoot has written an excellent scholarly account of the transmission of the biblical text. *How We Got the Bible* is published by Baker Book House and is still available. Dr. Lightfoot answers many of the questions just mentioned in great detail. It is worth your time and study.

> "God is still speaking to the world and we do not have to miss out."

We can see that the New Testament started with the words of Christ, and passed on to the apostles and those they appointed. They had the power and the gift to give us Scripture. Very early writings were gathered to give the church unity and fight false doctrine. Other books were left out because they did not reflect the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

God is still speaking to the world and we do not have to miss out. I was not there when Elijah called down the fire of God. Neither was I there when the blind man was healed by our wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But God through His powerful hand has preserved the stories for my reading and understanding. I am grateful to God. I can be assured of my salvation through the message of God because He has given us a rule and guide with which all who call themselves Christians can be unified in mutual submission to its words and message. May God be praised for His work!

Vernon Dugger is campus minister at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC, a work that is overseen by the elders of the church in Sylva, NC. He may be contacted at P.O. Box 101, Sylva, NC 28779.

Archaeology and the Bible

Alan Smith

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a great deal of criticism was leveled against the Bible regarding its reliability as a historical document, a criticism which continues to this day. The Old Testament has been described by some scholars as a "patchwork of popular folk tales and legends," a book which cannot be regarded as historical or verifiable. The basis of such criticism has often been a lack of evidence from outside sources to confirm the Biblical record. Many scholars take the position that since the Bible is a religious book, it cannot be trusted unless we have corroborating evidence from extrabiblical sources.

It is here that archaeology has made a dramatic contribution, by way of confirming the amazing accuracy of the Word of God. Although it is not possible to verify every incident in theBible, the discoveries of archaeology since the mid-1800s have repeatedly confirmed the biblical record, thereby reinforcing our confidence in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. Even unbelievers have been forced to more closely examine the Bible and its message due to the finding of archaeology.

It is important, though, that we recognize that archaeological evidence is confirmatory in nature rather than actually providing proof of the inspiration of the Bible. Archaeology and other external evidences can help prove the factuality of the biblical record, but that does not, in and of itself, prove inspiration. While you would expect (and, in fact, you would demand) that an inspired book would be historically correct, other books might meet that test and yet be uninspired. For example, a book about Roman life in the first century could be historically correct in every point, but that would not prove the book was inspired.

Rubel Shelly has correctly observed, "What, then, is the value of archaeology in relation to apologetics? Archaeology serves to confirm the credibility of the individual writers of both the Old and New Testaments and, as a result, gives testimony to their integrity when they claim to speak with divine authority about the nature of God or the requirements for salvation" (Rubel Shelly, *What Shall We Do With the Bible?*, Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, Inc., 1975, p. 58).

If the statements of the Bible which are capable of being checked are verified by extrabiblical sources and if none of those biblical statements can be dismissed as inaccurate, then any reasonable and fair-minded person would be inclined to accept this as powerful evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures.

There are indeed many such statements, and the purpose of this article will be to set forth several examples to show how archaeology serves to bolster our faith in God's Word.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Archaeology has discovered people, events and whole civilizations which were previously unknown to historians except for references made in the Old Testament. Trude Dothan, an expert on Philistine sites at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, has made the statement, "Without the Bible, we wouldn't have even known there were

Philistines" (Jeffrey L. Sheler, "Mysteries of the Bible," *U. S. News and World Report*, April 17, 1995). The same thing could be said of the Hittites, a race of people once thought to be a biblical legend, until their capital and records were discovered at Bogazkoy, Turkey. It was once claimed by critics of the Bible that there was no Assyrian king named Sargon as recorded in Isaiah 20:1, because this name was not known in any other record. Then, in 1843, Sargon's palace was discovered in Khorsabad, Iraq. In fact, the very event mentioned in Isaiah 20, his capture of the city of Ashdod, was recorded on the palace walls. Even more recently, in the early 1970's, an excavation at Ashdod unearthed the fragments of a stele (an engraved stone pillar used for commemorative purposes) which memorialized Sargon's victory over Ashdod.

Another king who was in doubt for many years was Belshazzar, the Babylonian king mentioned in Daniel 5. According to recorded history, the last king of Babylon was Nabonidus. Critics felt certain that the biblical account was inaccurate until tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son who served as co-regent in Babylon. That archaeological discovery actually served to shed light on the statement made in Daniel 5:16, where Belshazzar offered to make Daniel "the third ruler in the kingdom" for reading the handwriting on the wall.

One of the most recent archaeological discoveries, and perhaps one of the most important, has to do with King David. Because of the amazing feats the Old Testament attributes to David, some modern scholars have suggested he was a mythical character. The theory was based largely on the absence of nonbiblical references to him or his kingdom, which stretched from Dan in the north to Beershebain the south.

However, in 1983, an inscription was found on a stele at Dan which has provided Bible scholars with the first extrabiblical mention of David. Experts are still deciphering the 13-line text, but two words that are readable are "Bet David," which means the house of David, or the dynasty of David. Archaeologist Avraham Biran, former director of the Israel Department of Antiquities, has concluded the one-foot square stone is part of a larger victory stele of King Ben–Hadad of Damascus, erected following a campaign against Dan and other cities of Israel in the early ninth century B.C., about 100 years after David (Gordon Govier, "Dig Uncovers Davidic Roots," *Christianity Today*, October 4, 1993, p. 60). The monument quite possibly could refer to the battles mentioned in I Kings 15-20, wherein the cities of Israel were defeated by Ben–Hadad. Until this discovery, the Israelite kings Omri, Ahab and Jehu were the earliest biblical figures known from extrabiblical sources. They are mentioned in inscriptions of the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III, found in the last century. The skeptics' claim that David never existed is now difficult to defend.

At Tell el–Husn in Beth–Shan, ruins of several temples have been uncovered. One from the twelfth century B.C. was dedicated to Ashtaroth, a Canaanite goddess. Archaeologists say this is almost certainly the temple referred to in I Samuel 31:10 where, after King Saul's death, soldiers "put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth."

From the end of Solomon's reign in about 920 B.C., through the Babylonian exile, about 540 B.C., much of biblical history is supported by numerous inscriptions and other archaeology sources. Excavations near modern day Baghdad, Iraq, for example, turned up lists of ration allowances granted by Nebuchadnezzar to, among others, "Yaukin, king of Judah". That is believed to be a reference to Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah of whom it was said, "And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life" (2 Kings 25:30).

In 1986, archaeologists identified the impressions stamped into a piece of clay as coming from a seal belonging to Baruch, son of Neriah, the scribe who recorded the proclamations of the prophet

Jeremiah (Jer. 36:32). Another impression bore the seal of Jerahmeel, King Jehoiakim's son, who was sent on an unsuccessful mission to arrest both Jeremiah and Baruch (Jer. 36:26), again confirming the existence of biblical characters.

It is true that very little archaeological evidence exists from the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 B.C.), the time period many scholars consider to be the patriarchal era. But the ruins of a number of sites that figure in the patriarchal stories—including Ur, Shechem, Ai and Hebron—have been located. One ancient city, Haran in upper Mesopotamia, appears to have been a major commercial hub in the period when Abraham and his father would have arrived there after leaving Ur (Gen. 11:31).

Furthermore, the stories from the book of Genesis are consistent with what archaeologists and historians know about the form of treaties, contracts and other social conventions of the ancient world. Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen of the University of Liverpool offered what has been called an "extraordinary demonstration" in *Biblical Archaeology Review* that the stories about Abraham are plausible. Drawing on nonbiblical records, he argues that everything from the quoted price of slaves to the style of warfare to the laws of inheritance in Abraham's day is amazingly consistent with the Bible accounts (Marlin Levin, Felice Maranz and Richard N. Ostling, "Are the Bible Stories True?," *Time*, December 18, 1995).

There are still many parts of the Old Testament for which little or no conclusive evidence has been found. That is to be expected. "It's a truism in archaeology that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Digging up the past is a hit-or-miss proposition. And one hit can demolish amountain of skepticism (Ibid)."

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Recent archaeological finds have not been quite as crucial in the study of the New Testament, but only because there is more external evidence that corroborates the biblical account which has existed for some time.

Archaeology confirms the historicity of characters mentioned by New Testament writers. In 1961, for example, an inscription found at Caesarea Maritima confirmed that Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect in Judea at the time of Jesus' crucifixion.

For years, critics challenged the accuracy of Luke's reference to the birth of Christ "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:2). It was alleged that Cyrenius (also known as Quirinius) held this position between A.D. 6 and 12, which would have been too late to fit Luke's narrative. But archaeological discoveries now offer proof that Cyrenius was governor of Syria twice. Two inscriptions, one found at Antioch in Pisidia and the other in a village near Antioch, show he was governor at the time of Christ and that he held the same office again at a later time.

> "If presented honestly and without a liberal bias, biblical archaeology never contradicts the Bible."

But the most recent archaeological discovery related to New Testament study, and perhaps the most significant in many years, was made in 1990. Workers were building a water park near Jerusalem when the ground suddenly gave way, revealing a burial cave dating back to the first century A.D. In 1992, Israeli archaeologists announced that the tomb could contain the bones of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who handed Jesus over to the Romans for execution (John 18:24-28). This was an amazing discovery! Never before had archaeologists come across the remains of a New Testament figure. The remains were found in one of 12 ornate ossuaries, ceremonial boxes used by the Jews during New Testament times to store the bones of the dead to await the resurrection. One box, more ornate than the rest, was inscribed with Caiaphas' name and contained the remains of a 60-year-old man now thought to be Caiaphas (Jeffrey L. Sheler, "Biblical Bones," *U.S. News & World Report*, August 24, 1992, p. 16).

All of the New Testament is historically accurate. But the accuracy of Luke is especially powerful in its impact on the honest mind. Sir William Ramsay, who lived at the turn of this century, is generally held to be one of the greatest archaeologists who ever lived. He was taught and accepted the notion that the book of Acts was the product of the mid-second century and was unreliable as a document of history. He began his archaeological work with these assumptions, but as his work progressed, he was both surprised and impressed with Luke's accuracy with regard to historical detail. For those of us who accept the Bible as God's inspired Word, that accuracy comes as no surprise.

CONCLUSION

We need to recognize that archaeology is an interpretive science. That means that there will always be some archaeologists who are quick to interpret new discoveries in such a way that contradict or discredit biblical accounts. But archaeology is no enemy of the Word of God. If presented honestly and without a liberal bias, biblical archaeology never contradicts the Bible. To the contrary, it has helped verify numerous parts of the Old and New Testaments, and has thrown light on dark spots of the Scripture that were difficult to understand. Its accuracy in matters of detail serves to confirm our conviction that the Bible can be trusted and that it is nothing short of the inspired Word of God.

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Human Experience Verifies the Bible

Jerry Senn

In 1891, J.W. McGarvey penned an essay called, "The Old Faith Restated," in which he set out what he called "the Narrowest Ground of Belief." In an age when evaluation of vast amounts of evidence seems to be required in order for our faith to be valid and meaningful, his remarks are a breath of fresh air:

"A large majority of the believers of this age...have received the Bible as the word of God on... one and only one ground...They have been trained from earliest childhood to look upon the Bible as a sacred book; to reverence it as a most precious gift from God; to abhor unbelief in reference to it as a deadly sin, and to tremble when the least shadow of doubt concerning it passes across their minds. They have learned to estimate the truth of all other writings by their agreement or disagreement with this; and they fully expect to be judged by it in the day of final accounts. If they are called upon to give a reason for this implicit faith, they seldom go farther than to answer, 'We have been brought up to believe the Bible; our fathers and mothers before us have believed it; and we have never thought of doubting it.'

This ground of faith has not received the respectful consideration to which it is entitled. It is often stigmatized as purely traditional and unreasoning; and so it appears to be. But is it any less valuable on this account? On what depends the value of faith in anything that is of a practical nature? On the reasons which the believer can give for his faith? Or on the firmness with which he maintains his faith, and the exactness with which he puts it into practice? Faith in the genuineness of medicines, in the skill of physicians, in the honesty of men and business, in the constancy of friendship and of marital vows, in everything on which life and well-being depend, derives its value from the latter consideration, and not at all from the former. If the religion taught in the Bible is true, the blessings which it offers to men are bestowed on those who believe, and who live in accordance with their faith, without the slightest regard to the reasons or the causes which induced them to believe...

This ground of faith has been pronounced not only traditional and unreasoning, but insufficient for the trials to which faith must be subjected. For some persons it has proved insufficient; and these have either abandoned the faith, or found better ground for believing; but it has proved sufficient for the majority of believers in ages past, and it will for ages to come. If the good results of faith are dependent, not on the causes of it, but on its steadfastness and its fruits, it follows that a faith which does not waver, and which brings forth these fruits to the end of life, has a sufficient basis in which to rest. The faith of the class now under consideration does remain steadfast to the end, and it does bring forth the required fruits. Myriads of them are now living, and myriads more have gone to rest, the shield of whose faith was never pierced by a single dart of unbelief. These believers met the arguments of unbelief, so far as they encountered them, with a smile or a frown, according to the temperament of each; they pitied the unbeliever as an unfortunate and wayward man; they turned to their Bibles with greater confidence and affection in proportion as it was assailed; they walked humbly with their God, and truly with their neighbors; and in the hour of death they were not afraid. It is offered as an objection, that the same may be truly said of faith in other books, supposed to be sacred, and in other religions which are conceded to be of human origin. As respects the ground of faith, this must be admitted; but what follows? It does not follow that all books and religions thus received are equally true and equally beneficial to their adherents. The claims of each to be true depend on the evidences which can be presented in its favor; and this is supposed to be beyond the ken of the humble believers of whom we now speak. If any one of these religions is true and divine, the believer in it reaps all the good that is in it, if any, and he also just as certainly tastes all the bitter fruits which a false system must necessarily bear. The objection, then, is without weight; and the ground on which a countless host of God's children have rested their faith is vindicated. It has provedsufficient for them, though many of them have passed through much tribulation to the region in which they have laid up their treasures" (quoted in *What the Bible Says About the Bible*, Owen L. Crouch, College Press, pp 262-265).

McGarvey was not at all opposed to pursuing other levels of evidence for faith in the Bible. His great book, *Evidences of Christianity*, represents his considerable efforts in this regard. He is merely saying that faith itself and its impact on the believer's life is more valuable than his reasons for believing. Thus, we must not look with arrogance upon the simple souls whose faith in the Bible rested only in what was handed down from their fathers. It was traditional, but it was right, and thus it supported a valid and secure faith.

But in a day when faith in the Bible is challenged and when even "so-called" believers are unsure the sacred volume is an absolute guide to faith and practice, surely we must appeal to other levels of evidence.

If you were concerned about the value of a particular medicine as to its curative abilities, would it not be wise to measure its effect on others? Must we learn complicated chemical formulas and fully comprehend their make-up before we place our faith in their value? We're happy someone is making those evaluations, but the test for the common man is whether it works. If so, why will it not work for me? If a substance has beneficial results when used properly by others, why would I refuse to make good use of it?

In the realm of morals and human need, man has not changed since the sixth day of creation. He needs physical, emotional, mental and spiritual nourishment to enjoy a satisfying existence. Modern psychology agrees. Yet every effort of man, using his considerable intelligence, has failed miserably to provide the essential ingredients for human happiness. Man, struggling with guilt, loneliness and despair, receives only fleeting moments of relief using human panaceas. Failing to acknowledge his need for help from a higher non–human source, man travels a wide circle of endless, trivial pursuit—the dog chasing his elusive tail.

Does this not describe modern culture? We sometimes seem to be a people who have everything to live with but little to live for. Medical science, psychiatry, and social action explore every tributary of knowledge, expending trillions, while man lingers in the grip of guilt, loneliness and despair with a nagging sense of his own insignificance. It is not in man to effectively direct his steps. Our study of history or daily events confirm the moral mess—the pain and misery—which results from man living without God.

Can we dare believe the ancient book holds the answer to our greatest needs? How can we be sure it came from God? Study every line of evidence available, but be impressed with the simplicity and power of seeing the obvious.

First, we know man could not have produced it if he had wanted to, and he would not have wanted to if he could have.

Second, without scientific skills or access to the tools historians use to verify documents, we may believe the Bible came from God because it works in daily life. Not one moral or ethical principle we learn in studying the Bible will fail if incorporated into life by honest, humble, yielded hearts.

Third, the Bible as it is (properly translated) is perfectly adaptable to man as he is, in any age or culture.

Fourth, it contains the only explanation of man's nature and needs which is consistent with reality.

All mature humans know they will be held accountable to a being outside themselves for their choices, guilt being the inevitable result of human imperfection. Science cannot explain moral nature (the conscience).

Fifth, the Bible deals with man's failure by presenting an authentic record of a risen savior, whose sacrificial death paid man's sin debt, offering forgiveness without cost to all who truly trust and obey Him. What remedy is offered by godless men?

Sixth, this "good book" has often been assailed by the "great" minds of history, yet none have halted its popularity or curtailed its power to mold lives. The anvil has worn out a thousand hammers.

Seventh, the Bible's appeal does not rest in mindless superstition but on logical deductions made after weighing the very best evidence available to unbiased truth seekers.

Why then do men continue to reject the Bible, refusing to be led by its evident wisdom? It is because, as we read it, it reads us (Hebrews 4:12-13). The words of Scripture fly in the face of man's failed efforts, demanding transformation of will and redirection of life. For the same reason Adam and Eve refused God's benevolent wisdom, men today rush to ruin, ears closed to the solitary voice of hope found on the pages of the Book only God could write, the Bible. What a tragic choice!

We don't need scholars to tell us the Bible works. Open your eyes and watch the lives of those who continue to reject the practical yet powerful words of Scripture. Review the results where Bible truth is upheld and consistently followed. The evidence for the Bible is right before our eyes.

A learned Chinese, translating the New Testament into his language, after a few weeks said, "This is a wonderful Book." When asked why, he replied, "Because, it tells me so exactly about myself. It knows all that is in me. The One who made this Book must be the One who made me." What insight! If only we were as good as our Book, what a different place this world would be!

The crucible of human experience may well be the most powerful and persuasive line of evidence for the Bible's inspiration.

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Is the Bible Complete?

JIM MULLICAN

In considering the trustworthiness of the Bible, we are faced not only with the question of whether what it says is true, but also whether it contains all the truth which we need for salvation. Are there other inspired books which, for whatever reasons, were not included when the books which make up the Bible were collected?

Regarding the Old Testament, two classes of books have sought a place among the thirty-nine scriptural books. One is known as the apocrypha. This word originally meant "hidden" or "concealed," and referred to teachings supposedly suppressed by or unknown to the mainstream religious leadership. In modern usage, though, this word primarily refers to fourteen books or parts of books which appear in Catholic Bibles but not in those generally used by others. Some of these are collections of wisdom literature. Some relate events which are purported to have happened in the lives of individual Jews. Some relate popular stories of miracles. Some relate genuine history, and some are later additions to accepted Old Testament books. Based on such considerations as their late date (after the close of the prophetic period) and unknown or too-well-known authorship, these books were never accepted by the Jewish rabbis as scripture. They were often included in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and in the Vulgate, the Latin version on which Catholic Bibles are based. None of these books is ever quoted as scripture in the New Testament, and they contain no important teachings not con-tained in the genuine Old Testament. We have no reason to doubt that the Jewish rabbis made the correct assessment as to which books had been inspired by God and which were pretenders.

The other class of books relating to the Old Testament is called pseudepigrapha. This word means "false scripture" or "false writings," and a collection of sixty-three such works is available to anyone who wishes to buy it (James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols.). These are generally fictional adventures or teachings placed in the mouth of some biblical character by a later writer in an effort to lend credibility to his ideas. Some of the titles are "Vision of Ezra," "Prayer of Jacob," and "Testament of Solomon." Some of these books are later than the New Testament, and all have been recognized as fakes by all but the ones who composed them to prop up a peculiar idea. Many contain obvious historical errors. Their quality is far below that of scripture.

A similar situation exists in regard to the New Testament. The "Acts of Paul," as well as those of Peter, John, Thomas, Thaddeus, Philip, Andrew and Matthias were all written, perhaps in many cases to while away long winter days in early monasteries. In addition, several early sectarian groups wrote their own versions of the gospel, in which they placed their pet doctrines in the mouth of Jesus. Some imaginative "gospels" tell of a young man who had been bewitched and turned into a mule, but when the young boy Jesus rode him, he became a man again (*The Lost Books of the Bible*, pp. 44-54). The same one tells of Jesus making toy birds fly and clay animals talk. It also tells of Joseph being such a poor carpenter that after working two years on a throne chair for the "King of Jerusalem," he has a finished product two feet too narrow! Jesus pulls on one side while Joseph pulls on the other, and they stretch it to the right size. This kind of trivial fiction in no way compares to the sober accounts of the life of Jesus penned by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

One serious possibility for a lost book of the New Testament has been proposed, however. Paul tells the Colossian church, "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4:16, NIV). Colossae and Laodicea were only about fifteen miles apart, so exchanging copies of the letters Paul wrote to each church would be no problem. Yet we have no Epistle to the Laodiceans in the New Testament. What has become of it? At least four possibilities must be considered.

The first is that the letter no longer exists. Perhaps it contained nothing which is not taught elsewhere in the New Testament and the Holy Spirit saw no need to preserve it. Paul seems to have written a total of four letters to the Corinthian church, of which we have his second and fourth. First Corinthians 5:9 refers to a previous letter, and 2 Corinthians 2:3-9 and 7:8-12 refer to a letter so severe that Paul had second thoughts after sending it. Why these letters were not preserved we do not know.

A second possibility is a letter called "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Laodiceans" (*The Lost Books of the Bible*, p. 94). It consists of only nineteen verses, all of which are lifted from various letters of Paul in the New Testament. It appears to be a forgery compiled by someone bothered by this missing epistle long ago.

A third possibility is that what we know as the Ephesian Epistle also went to Laodicea. The oldest copies of the Ephesian letter lack the words "in Ephesus" in Ephesians 1:1. In addition, although Paul spent perhaps more time in Ephesus than with any of the other churches he planted, he greets no individuals within that church. All this has led some to think Ephesians may have been a circular letter sent to several churches, but that since the New Testament books were perhaps first gathered together at Ephesus, their copy was included as the letter to Ephesus, even though it went to other churches as well. About A.D. 140, the heretic Marcion labeled it as the letter to the Laodiceans.

The fourth possibility, I believe, is correct, and that is that our Epistle to Philemon is the letter to the Laodiceans. We've already noted that Colossae and Laodicea were neighboring cities. Onesimus, the subject of the Epistle to Philemon, accompanies Tychicus when he delivers the Colossians letter (Colossians 4:7-9). The Colossians are given a message to relay to Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord." This would indicate they knew him, but he was not in the Colossian church. However, he may have been Philemon's son (Philemon 1,2). Thus we have considerable evidence to place Philemon in Laodicea.

Is the Bible complete? Yes. It contains "everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who has called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). Nothing else comes close.

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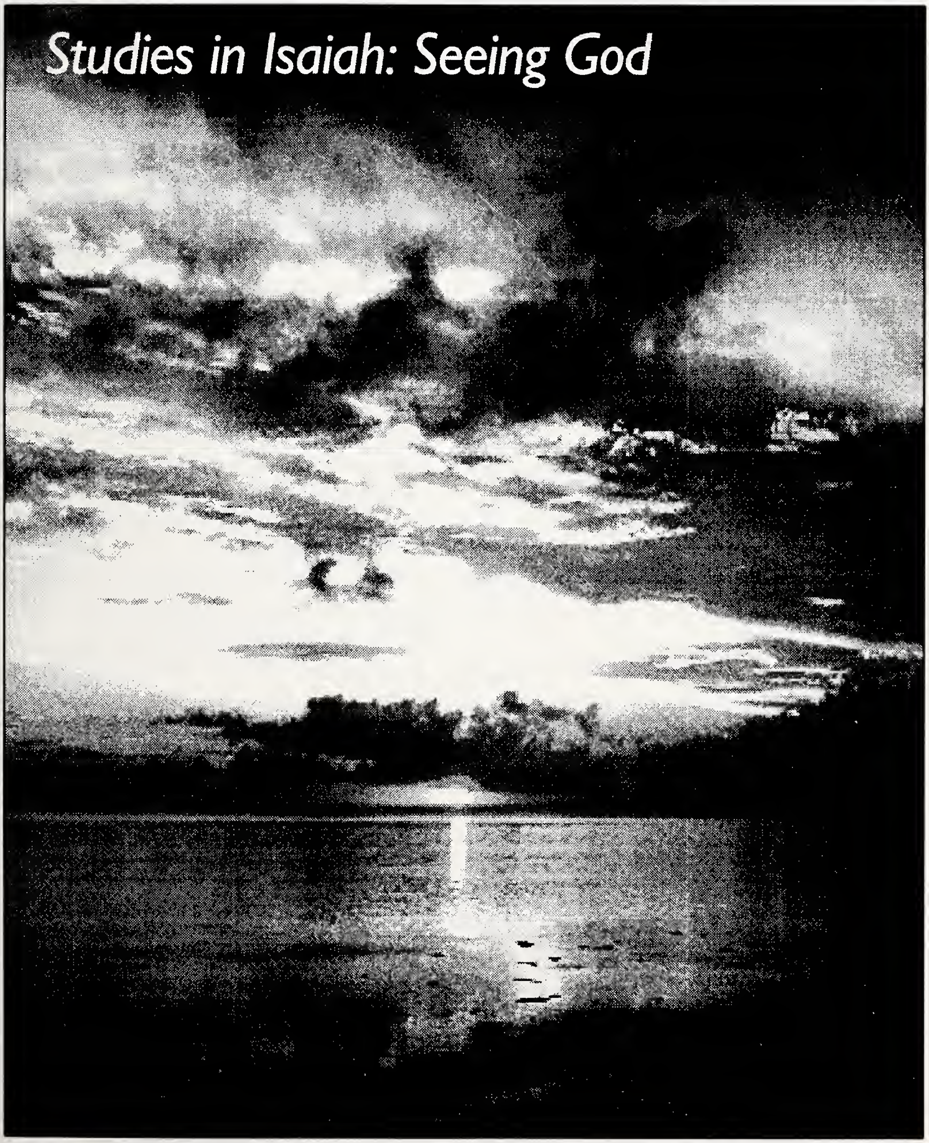

Studies in Isaiah: Seeing God

CAROLINA christian

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Editorial:

The Ministry of the Thorn

DENNIS CONNER

Scripture is replete with the stories of great people of faith who spent time on the mountain top, experiencing exquisite spiritual victories and displays of God's power. We think of Elijah and his victory over the prophets of Baal; David and his defeat of the Philistine champion Goliath; and the ultimate mountaintop experience—Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. And we ourselves, while not being able to boast of such experiences as these, can nevertheless recall our own moments spent on the mountaintop; those times when it all seems to come together and we see for ourselves the display of God's power in some event or circumstance that is uniquely spiritual.

However, each of the great spiritual experiences mentioned earlier was also followed by time spent in the valley. Elijah's victory was followed by Jezebel's threat on his life, and he fled in despair and depression. David's victory over Goliath, and the resulting admiration of the people of Israel, led to an obsessive jealousy in King Saul, who then sought to eliminate his competition. And of course, for Jesus there was Gethsemane and then the cross. And likely you didn't stay on the mountaintop for long either, but soon found yourself back down in the valley.

Paul could also boast of a mountaintop experience. As a matter of fact, he had one that is unparalleled in human experience. He described it this way, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven...he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, such as it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). Immediately afterward, though, he experienced a stark reminder of reality, a thorn in the flesh. However, rather than despising the times of weakness and seeming defeat in his life, Paul learned some important truths about the life of faith. The thorn served a needed purpose.

Paul had experienced a remarkable vision in which he was caught up into the third heaven and heard things that were simply too overwhelming to speak of in human terms. It was the ultimate spiritual experience, one that could easily lend itself to boasting. Lest he give in to such a temptation, Paul states that he was given a "thorn in the flesh" which he also referred to as "a messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7); that is, something that Satan was able to use to disrupt Paul's life and ministry. Now, did Paul use this as an occasion to play on the sympathy of his readers? Significantly, no. Rather, he used this whole experience as an occasion to make a valuable observation about the place of suffering in Christian ministry.

As Paul explained it, this thorn was given for a purpose: to keep him humble. It kept him from boasting of and glorying in his spiritual highs. The thorn reminded him of the realities of life and his dependence upon God. The thorn was a constant reminder of the danger of self–exaltation.

Still, he prayed three times for its removal. We shouldn't be surprised, for that is a natural desire and prayer. It is much like we ourselves have prayed in times of weakness and difficulty. We cry, plead, and beg "take it away." Just like us, Paul at first thought the only adequate solution was to remove the problem. And he did get an answer to his prayers, but likely not the answer he was anticipating.

God's answer? "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." What a revelation! Human weakness may be an occasion for the triumph of divine grace. "Grace" is used here in the sense of strength that God imparts. Paul saw the thorn as something that hindered his ministry. God saw it as an opportunity to display His power. Paul's weakness did not hinder the effectiveness of God's power; rather, it merely enhanced it.

And Paul's response? "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). The only thing to boast of now was the experience of the power of Christ in his life and weakness. Paul not only accepted his weakness, but came to welcome it as an opportunity for the power of God in Christ to be manifested in his life. Now, Paul would rather have the power of Christ at work in his life than to have relief from suffering.

There emerges from this passage a challenge for the modern Christian to see the issue of weakness in a spiritual light.

First of all, we must recognize the intended purpose of weakness in our spiritual development. For Paul, that purpose was to instill humility, and so it is today. Our weakness reminds us of the limitations of our own strength and the need for divine strength. God's power can function only where there is weakness, and where that weakness is acknowledged. God cannot help or use those who embrace the illusion of self–sufficiency. Infirmities, distresses, difficulties and other manifestations of weakness all serve to burst the bubbles of our carefully cultured delusions. To recognize our need for God is to place ourselves in a position to be used by God.

Second, we must recognize that weakness is not to be shunned, but welcomed. Weakness belongs to the human condition and when accepted allows the power of God free reign. This is the paradox of weakness, as realized by Paul: when we rely upon our own strength, then we are weak—but when we are weak, then we are strong.

Finally, we must learn to rest in the assurance that whatever the weakness, the grace of God is sufficient. Whatever our distresses and struggles, the grace of God is more than adequate to meet them. It is never in short supply. It cannot be used up, drained dry, or exhausted. There is always more than enough to see us through. This prayer penned by Nancy Speigelberg expresses well the truth of the sufficiency of the Lord's grace, "Lord, I crawled across the barrenness to You with my empty cup of uncertainty, asking any small drop of refreshment. If only I had known You better, I would have come running to You with a bucket."

Effectiveness in Christian ministry and discipleship lies not in the absence of weakness, but in dependence upon God's strength. We must learn to see weakness not as an occasion for ineffectiveness, but as an opportunity for the display of God's abundant power. Let us pray not that God would eliminate our problems, but that He would enlarge our hearts.

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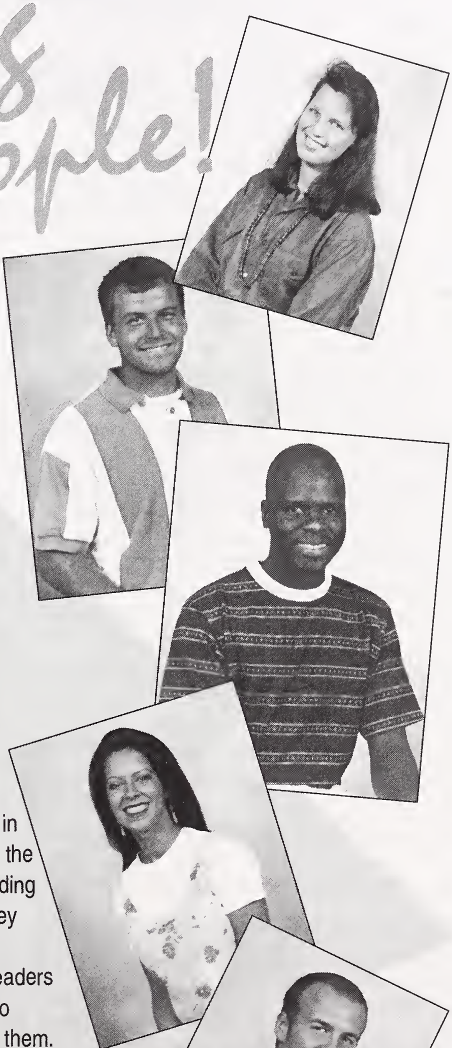

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Guest Editorial:

Getting a Glimpse of God in Isaiah

BAILEY FORREST

I know that God is alive and that He is present and working in peoples' lives to change them. If ever there was a fact to be trusted, it is that **God is always at work** to convince us of His tremendous love for us. He was at work when He saved Noah and his family. He was at work in the famine in Egypt in the time of Joseph. He was at work when Moses was born. He was at work when Israel was taken captive by Babylon. And He was at work when the Jews killed Jesus by the hand of the Romans. God is always actively seeking to win our hearts to Him.

Paul acknowledged this fact when he gave his famous speech at the celebrated center for philosophical argument in Athens, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth...From one man He made every nation of men...He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-28).

Sometimes, especially when those times are particularly hard, we might wonder if God is in fact near. How could He be near and still allow the terrible events to happen that I witness and experience? Yet, God is near even in the hardest times.

God's desire is that we see Him, and in seeing Him that we turn our hearts to Him in love and adoration. Isaiah was the prophet of vision. To Isaiah, King Uzziah had been a good king for Judah. Then, in the year of Uzziah's death, it appears that Isaiah was distraught over the future of Judah. Would another good king rule for the sake of Judah, or was Judah soon to be left in the hands of an evil ruler? In that insecure time the Lord appeared to Isaiah (Isa. 6). God determined that Isaiah needed to see Him. Isaiah was to be the Lord's messenger of vision in dark times. Isaiah's message would be about the devastation of Israel. He was to tell how the Lord was about to chastise Judah through calamity so that the people would turn to Him once again. Isaiah was to see God so that he would know that the Lord was at work even in those days, and so that he could tell the people of God's marvelous redemption to come.

Yes, our Lord is always at work so that we might realize His tremendous love. Our prayer is that this issue of *Carolina Christian* might help you to see God's holiness and love, leading to a response of adoration and praise.

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Joe Cannon, Director, Highland St. Church of Christ
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What Does God Think of Our Worship? (Isaiah 1:4-17)

DEAN BARHAM

Years ago I heard a story about a man who was touring several countries in the Middle East. At one point on his journey he came across some local residents lounging by the side of the road. Feeling particularly friendly that day he thought to himself, "Maybe we can't understand each other's language, but that doesn't mean that we can't communicate in some way." So, with aspirations of international peace and world unity, he raised his hand to greet them as he passed by! You can imagine his shock when the residents' hands responded not by waving in a friendly reply, but by hurling several rocks at his second–rate rental car. Fortunately, he escaped without much harm, although he was puzzled and angry at the turn of events. His anger quickly turned to embarrassment, however, when he learned that in this society, a wave of greeting was done with one's palm facing inward. Waving at a person with the palm outward represented an insult!

This vignette demonstrates how easy it is for two people to view the same situation in entirely two different ways. Perhaps that is one reason there is so much controversy surrounding the subject of worship today. Books abound offering promises of "worship renewal," magazines and journals explore and debate the proper elements and styles of worship. The current renewed emphasis on what is a central aspect of our Christian identity is admirable, but as our humble Mid–East traveler reminds us, peace and unity around this subject will never occur until we all understand what we are talking about. Biblically speaking, just what is worship?

The Proper Ritual?

Well, that's easy—right? We all know that worship is a few songs, some prayers, the Lord's Supper, the collection, and a sermon. Well, isn't it? It is so easy to slip into thinking that it is merely the elements of worship that make worship what it is. Israel had this same tendency.

" 'The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?' says the Lord. 'I have more thanenough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats' " (Isa. 1:11).

Although we are to do certain things in our worship to the Lord, the Bible stresses that, at its core, worship is not just what we do. Worship is not about discovering the proper rituals and rehearsing them every week.

At least three dangers exist with equating worship with ritual. First, the heartless performance of rituals, even the right ones, is a burden to the heart of God. In Isaiah, God voiced His feelings about Israel's feasts and sacrifices—sacrifices which they were commanded by law to perform. *"Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them"* (Isa. 1:14). Our worship is to be a sweet sacrifice to the nostrils of God, but even the correct rituals offered with the wrong mindset can become like the stench of refuse to Him.

The second danger is that it is possible to perform all the acts of worship with ritualistic perfection, and yet still not know God. *"The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand"* (Isa. 1:3). The Pharisees of the New Testament had perfected the art of ritual performance, and yet Jesus said that they had never heard the voice of God, nor seen His form (John 5:37-38). What a tragedy! Hearing this must have been like that experienced by Jim Marshall (former lineman of the Minnesota Vikings) when he picked up a fumble, sprinted over 60 yards to the endzone, and thrust his hands in the air—only to find that he had run in the wrong direction and scored a safety for the other team! He had done all the right things; he just ran to the wrong goal. What a tragedy it would be if we did all of the right things in our assemblies, but never grew in our knowledge of God.

A third danger in seeing worship as ritual is that we can perform all of the commanded rituals and still be wasting away inside. Israel was a religious people, yet God recognized that *"your whole head is injured, your heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts..."* (Isa. 1:5-6). How easy it is to "go to church," sing, pray, and leave, all the while rotting away inside because of some pain or sin paralyzing our lives. True worship was, and is, intended to be more than an empty routine.

The Proper Place?

If worship is not the proper ritual, then perhaps it has to do with the proper place or event. We realize that it is a misnomer to say "go to church," because the church is a body of people, not a building. So, we substitute the term "worship" instead. Now, we don't go to church, we go to "worship." And worship, then, is not just what we do; it is where we go. The difficulty with this correction is that we change the words without solving the problem. Consider Jesus' statement to the woman who asked about the "right" place to worship.

"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem...A time is coming when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they re the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:21-24).

Although our worship to the Lord certainly affects where we will spend our time, Jesus makes it clear that *worship is not where we go.* Worship is not about finding the right place and showing up every week. It is not defined geographically nor is it confined within four walls.

The danger with equating worship with a place is that we begin to think that worship is something we do for a period of time and then leave for other things. As Mike Root observed, "On many occasions I entered an auditorium that had a sign over the door. The sign read, 'Enter to worship–Leave to Serve.' That statement is both right and wrong. The idea is right because wedo worship inside, but the idea is wrong because we never enter or leave to worship" (*Spilt Grape Juice*, College Press, p. 20).

In other words, worship and service are not unrelated. As Martin Luther once said, "When God purifies the heart...the market is sacred as well as the sanctuary."

Towards an Understanding of True Worship

When then is true, biblical worship? Throughout both the Old and New Testaments alike, God repeatedly indicates that worship is not just what we do or where we go; rather, it is just as much *who we are.* Jesus understood that visiting Mt. Gerizim or the temple in Jerusalem was insufficient worship because the body could be there while the heart was not. Offering countless animals for sacrifice, Isaiah preached, was insufficient because God wants *us* on the altar and not our sheep: *"Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship"* (Rom. 12:1). Simply put, worship can in a sense be viewed as who we are everyday when we place our lives on the altar of God.

Thus, when we make the daily commitment to exalt God over ourselves, we are engaging in worship to God. This sacrificial attitude will result in proper ritual because we will seek to conduct our services to appeal to God's desires, and not our own. This attitude will also govern the places we visit, because we will find ourselves going where God sends us, not following our own whims. As we worship, we become people whose entire lives demonstrate our heartfelt conviction that He is greater than we are. It is my prayer that we can seek unity on this definition of worship: a people with a heart condition that we wish everyone to contract. "Hearts warmed by the love of God...hearts transfixed by the majesty of God...hearts falling in a holy hush at the awesome holiness of God...hearts bursting with jubilant praise at the goodness of God...hearts hungry to know God, and willing to be broken over things that break the heart of God" (Lynn Anderson, "Worship," *Campus Crosswalk*, Winter '95).

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What Is Our Identity Among the Nations? (Isaiah 2:1–4:1)

ROY BUCHANAN

Once there was a hopeful young boxer who was overmatched and who had had a particularly rough round. Returning to his corner of the ring, his trainer went through the post–round routine of smelling salts, Vaseline, face slaps and questions. Turning to the manager, the trainer said, "I think we have a problem. I don't think he knows who he is." The manager replied, "Hey, great! That's no problem. Jest tell him he's Muhammad Ali."

While there is humor in this story, there is also a truth about spiritual reality. Sometimes the way we live or the blows of life cause us to forget our identity. And though at times we feel we have been told we are better then we really are, we forget who made us, the dream He has for us and the chastisement He is willing to measure in order to see His dream fulfilled and our hope restored. So unfolds the tale.

A BEAUTIFUL VISION (ISAIAH 2:1-5)

God's plan for His people is beautiful. They will hold Him in high esteem and give Him priority over all else. Because of how they will live, nations will pour into Jerusalem. When the nations arrive, His people will teach these seekers how to live. For those unable to come (or perhapsunaware of what they were missing), the law will be brought to them. And justice and peace will be hallmark characteristics. What a splendid vision! What a great hope!

A BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE (ISAIAH 1:21)

For a while Jerusalem walks the road of fulfilling this dream for God. She is the "faithful city," full of justice and the home of righteousness. And how she fills God's heart with joy! When the Ark of the Covenant is first brought to the temple, God's presence is so overwhelming, the priests cannot perform their duties (1 Kings 8:10ff). Through the grace of God, justice prevails even in remarkably difficult cases (1 Kings 3:16ff). Men of all nations as well as the Queen of Sheba pour into Jerusalem (1 Kings 4:34; 10:1ff). His people, though not perfect, are distinct from their neighbors. God is pleased. Hope is strong.

AS UGLY AS SIN (ISAIAH 2:6; 3:16; 65:1-5)

However, like a drug–addicted man, her personality changes. The nation abandons what is holy and good for a list of sins long and distressing: Eastern superstitions, divination, pagan fellowship, idolatry. Without compassion they "crush the faces of the poor." Women become proud seducers walking along with "flirting eyes" and "mincing steps." Others in the nation "sit among graves and spend nights keeping secret vigil." They eat the flesh of pigs and say, "Don't come near me. I am too scared for you." And all of this is done without shame, for they "parade their sins like Sodom." In essence, they are no different than the nations around them, and although unaware of this truth, they are living a hopeless life. If the dream of God for a people with a distinctive identity is to be fulfilled, something drastic will need to take place.

THE DREAM RESTORED (ISAIAH 1:25F; 2:1-4:6)

God refuses to abandon His dream of the people through whom He has chosen to fulfill this dream, but they cannot remain as they are. Therefore, His action is firm and decisive. He will chastise His people and restore their hope.

Times will be terrible and fear will be great. Supply and support will be taken as men of rank die of hunger and the masses are parched with thirst. Through battle and attrition the number of men will shrink with devastating effects: experienced leadership will be a thing of the past and the pool of marriageable men will be so small that "seven women will take hold of one man and say, 'We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!' "

The social order will be full of oppression, disrespect and chaos. Women who were once proud and beautiful will become filthy, balk, sore–infested and branded. And at the end of all this humiliation will come exile.

However, the result will be worth the pain. God will restore His dream and the beauty of the nation. The dross will be purged and the impurities removed. The idols will be discarded, the bloodstain removed, and the filth of Zion's women will be washed away. Good leadership will be reestablished, those remaining will be called holy, and the shelter of God's presence will return. God will be pleased and the life will be good once more. Hope is restored.

IS HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?

If this were simply a history lesson, the tale could end here, but it isn't. God's dream is for "the last days," the days in which we are living. Today He wants us to be a people—as individuals and churches—who give Him priority. He wants those around us to be so astonished by our lives that they ask us, "Can you teach us how to live like this?" He wants us to be filled with such zeal and compassion that the law of love is taken to those who are unaware of what they are missing; and for justice and peace to be hallmark characteristics of our lives.

Is it possible that we have lost our identity as a distinctive people? Are we being seduced by Eastern superstition and fellowship with pagan ideals? What is our true concern for the poor? Which is our greater interest in life: looking good and catching someone's eye, or godliness? Is there arrogance in our religiosity? Are our lives, goals and drives really different from the world around us? Are we living hopeful or hopeless lives?

As frightening as this thought may be, there may be a need in some of our churches, our ministries, and perhaps even in our own lives to feel the chastening hand of God. We may be so enamored with our own goals and our pet programs that we fail to see what God wants in our lives. Our stupor may be so great that the only way He can get our attention is through a time of pain.

If such is the case, perhaps God in His mercy will chastise us. It is, after all, a sign of His love: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:5-6). And in chastising, not only will He express both His love and His displeasure, but He will reestablish the vision He has for us and restore our hope.

So, this is a story of two hopes. The first is that the vision of God is being lived out in our lives, our ministries, and our churches. The second is that if we have lost our distinctiveness and have substituted His dream for the tawdry, perhaps God will call us back through His chastising hand. By the grace and power of our Creator who dared to dream this dream of us, may we be for Him what He envisions and dwell in the hope He has established.

Roy Buchanan has served as campus minister for the Blacksburg Church of Christ for the past nine years. He can be contacted at 315 E. Eakin St., Blacksburg, VA 24060.

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Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

LUBBOCK, TX... Sunset International Bible Institute, formerly Sunset School of Preaching, has announced that it is opening a branch campus in Athens, Greece. Due to the geopolitical situation of that region, this will be a tremendous opportunity for the gospel to reach the souls of people and save them. *Steve Stamatis* will be the Dean of the Athens International Bible Institute, which will be opening sometime in September, 1997, with 20–30 students. The area is populated with over four and one half million people, including one million refugees from Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

WEST MONROE, LA... The White's Ferry Rd. Church of Christ is mobilizing a disaster relief effort for the victims of the natural disasters that have plagued the Pacific Coast this winter. For more details contact the church at P. O. Box 2000, West Monroe, LA 71294. You may send contributions to White's Ferry Rd. Relief Efforts at the same address.

CHARLOTTE, NC... The Providence Rd. church reports in a recent bulletin that it had 48 baptisms in 1996. The elders have also named *Kent Massey* as the new Associate Minister. Kent and his wife, Vallarie, have been members at Providence Road for eight years. He is a native of Charlotte who had previously been employed by the city.

MOCKSVILLE, NC... You can now find *Carolina Bible Camp* in cyberspace. CBC has its own web page at users.aol.com/cbiblecamp/cbchome.htm.

YADKINVILLE, NC... The eleventh annual Small Church Workshop, hosted by the Yadkinville Church of Christ, will be conducted May 15-16. The theme of this year's workshop is "Strengthening The Ties That Bind: the Practice of Fellowship in the Small Church." For more information call (910) 374-3199 or (910) 679-8924.

BLACK MOUNTAIN, NC... The dates for the 1997 Blue Ridge Encampment are June 16-20 and this year's theme will be "A Holy Hunger." Some of the featured speakers will be *Bill Butterfield, Charles Hodge, Alton Howard, Jerry* and *Lynn Jones*, and *John Kachelman, Jr.* The Executive Director is JimMankin of Abilene, TX. For more information contact the Vaughn Park Church of Christ, 3800 Vaughn Rd., Montgomery, AL 36106.

NASHVILLE, TN... David Lipscomb University announces that *Stephen F. Flatt* will succeed Harold Hazelip as the university's new President. Flatt has been the lead minister for the Madison Church of Christ and has also served in the past as a Vice-President at Lipscomb. Hazelip is retiring after eleven years in office. **Petrovsky, Ukraine...**The newly established congregation in Petrovsky appointed three elders the first Sunday of this year. Around 115 people were present for the service. The Petrovsky church was established in 1994 as the result of a campaign effort in the Donetsk region.

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Has God Not Done Enough?
(Isaiah 5:1-7)

David Holcomb

In the midst of the Jerusalem crowd a voice is heard. Isaiah the prophet speaks, and the people slowly turn their gaze to him:

"Let me sing for my beloved my love–song concerning the vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it" (5:1-2).

> "Just as God poured Himself out for Israel, so has He done for the church through the life and death of Jesus."

The people have become silent and deeply attentive as Isaiah shares about a farmer—an occupation they know and depend upon for life. Admiration for the farmer's thorough work must fill the listeners' thoughts. The best land. Back–breaking labor. Select vines. Protection from robbers. The farmer has spared no expense, monetarily or physically. Yes, he does love his land.

Finally, the farmer prepares a wine vat. Why? Because he fully expects a bountiful harvest for his expense and labor, and the crowd certainly agrees. Now they eagerly wait for Isaiah to fulfill their expectations.

"He expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?"

Unforeseen events. The crowd is surprised by the unfruitfulness of the vineyard, but even more shocked to be drawn into the story. No longer allowed to be passive listeners to a distant tale, they are confronted with painful questions—questions posed not only by the farmer but by Isaiah.

The love–song has turned into a courtroom drama with Isaiah as lawyer and the people as judges. What more could he have done? The land did not produce good fruit. Why?

Disappointment, frustration, betrayal, anger. These are among the emotions likely expressed by Isaiah and experienced by the crowd. Was there anything else to be done? Based on experience the crowd know the difficult answer: no.

After allowing these questions to weigh on the minds of his hearers, Isaiah continues:

"And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it."

Isaiah's conclusion is harsh, but from life experiences the people know the frustration of betrayal—of giving everything to make something work only to encounter failure. They understand the emotions. They accept the actions.

As the crowd contemplates the end to this painful story, they are caught off–guard by Isaiah's next statements:

"For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry."

Suddenly the tables have been turned. At one moment the crowd had joined in the distress and anger of Isaiah and the farmer, and now they are the objects of the Lord's distress and anger. They had sided with the one betrayed, but now they are the betrayers.

Isaiah claims that the Lord has diligently worked to "plant" Israel and Judah in the promised land of Canaan, calling Abraham and his descendants to be His chosen people, redeeming the people from slavery in Egypt, providing guidance through the Law given at Mount Sinai, giving victory over the nations when entering Canaan, and on and on. The Lord planted the people expecting the good fruit of justice and righteousness; instead they had produced the wild grapes of bloodshed and cries.

What more could the Lord have done for us? Why have we not lived justly and righteously? Does the Lord have any choice but to destroy us? These are the questions facing the crowd now that Isaiah has concluded the song of the vineyard.

Just as God poured Himself out for Israel, so has He done for the church through the life and death of Jesus. Likewise, God's desire for a response of justice and righteous—for faithful and loving relationships—remains. We must put ourselves in the place of those in Isaiah's crowd. Have we responded to God's work on our behalf with just and righteous relationships?

Immediately following the Song of the Vineyard is a series of six charges against Israel and Judah where Isaiah gives specifics about the peoples' failures (5:8-23). While each of these could certainly apply to our time and place, consider these three applications. First, are we needlessly accumulating possessions, failing to see the connection between our wealth and another's poverty (5:8-10)? Second, is our time so consumed by our success and entertainment oriented culture that we have no time to recognize God's work in our midst (5:11-12)? And finally, are we so confident in our own abilities to plan and organize for growing churches that we neglect the Spirit's empowerment and guidance (5:21)?

An honest evaluation of our lives, individually and collectively, is the only faithful response to the song of the vineyard and the charges which follow. God's words through Isaiah were meant to bring confession and repentance from His chosen people. These words are intended for the same purposes today. Only by acknowledging our deep sinfulness can we receive God's cleansing, a cleansing which will prepare us for use in God's ongoing mission to this world (6:1-8).

David Holcomb serves as campus minister for the Cole Mill Rd. church in Durham, NC. He can be contacted at 1617 Cole Mill Rd., Durham, NC 27705.

Do You Have Eyes to See?

(Isaiah 6:1-13)

VERNON DUGGER

Seeing God. From my youth I have always wanted to see God face to face, but my eyes have been blurred. I am much like the man who listens to music for the first time. I know I like it, but am not sure where it comes from or what it is saying. It is only after listening to many kinds of music that I learn what is good and what is bad. Training takes time. To understand the glorious symphony that our Lord is playing takes time. At my first hearing I knew I was observing something magnificent, but I was not sure what I saw and why it was glorious. I am just now seeing a glimpse of the fullness of God, but I want to see completely; more now than ever before. But do I have eyes to see? I want them. How do I get them?

Scripture is full of the struggle to see God. He is acting in mighty ways to reveal Himself and humanity is struggling to realize Him. We are trying to take off the blinders. The focus for me, however, is not the presence of God. I know that man cannot escape that, but we can miss His glory because of blindness. How do we move beyond blindness to seeing? To answer this question we must take a look at Isaiah 6.

This portion of the text serves as both a transition and an introduction.

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This is the text in which Isaiah received his call to become a prophet. The first five chapters of Isaiah describe a fallen Israel. Chapter seven speaks of Ahaz and his unfaithfulness. And amidst the blindness of both Israel and Ahaz, Isaiah sees God.

"In the year King Uzziah died I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling t one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke" (Isa. 6:1-4).

> "God wants us to see ourselves for what we really are and then allow Him to change us into what He has destined us to become."

The death of Uzziah marks the beginning of Isaiah's prophetic career. It was at some time during that period following the death of the king that Isaiah had a vision of God. It may have happened in his mind's eye during a temple service. It might have come in a dream. Or it might have been a physical appearing of some sort. Whichever, Isaiah saw a manifestation of God. The appearance of the Lord was regal and majestic. His kingly robe filled the temple and the seraphs, heavenly attendants to the Lord of all creation, announce the King's presence.

It is interesting to note that Uzziah had tried to burn incense in the temple because he had become prideful. In the vision, however, Isaiah sees the real and living God as King in the temple. God is the Holy one, not Uzziah. God is the mighty leader of Israel, not Uzziah. It is God's glory that expands to the ends of the earth and into eternity, not Uzziah's. The Almighty is King. With this realization and understanding, Isaiah saw things in a new way.

" 'Woe is me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty' " (Isa. 6:5).

When confronted with the exalted holiness of God, Isaiah could only see his own unholiness. The realization comes to him that he is unclean when standing before the Holy God. Not only has he missed the mark, but the sinfulness of the people around him is also clear. They, too, are unclean. This is a profound realization. It must have been hard for him to prior to the vision. He had been going to the temple all his life. He had been in Uzziah's court, serving God and serving his country. He must have been viewed by many as a righteous man. Yet, he was unclean and his comprehension of God incomplete. It took the death of the king and a vision of God to force him to see himself realistically. However, God did not leave Isaiah in his deep despair.

"Then one of the seraphs flew to me with al live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched our lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for' " (Isa. 6:6-7).

Neither does God leave us alone when He gives us eyes that can see His holiness and our sin clearly. He is standing ready with the forgiveness that only He can give. We're not whole, so God makes us holy. Isaiah is paid for and his sins taken away. The forgiven heart is given the ears to hear the call of God. *"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' "* (Isa. 6:8).

This experience of the forgiveness of God led Isaiah to another level of self–understanding: mission and service. He heard the voice of God calling for someone to sound His message through all creation. Isaiah responded by saying, *"Here am I. Send me!"*

He will go because his life is now whole. Having received the words of love and the touch of forgiveness, the call is to share the message with those all around.

"He said, 'God and tell this people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:9-10).

This section is heavy with sarcasm. What God wants is for His people to see, understand and be healed. Yet, He knows their hearts and their unwillingness to hear. The sarcasm might be used to help them understand their own predicament. The prophet then asked the Father how long he should preach to these people who do not care. To sum up verses 12 and 13, Isaiah was told to preach the message until it was over. Until there was nothing left; until there were no more people to hear it.

What can Isaiah teach us about seeing God today? First of all, it is sometimes in crisis that we see Him most clearly. Isaiah had lost his king, and it was in that time of hurting that God came to Him. Similarly today it is often in times of distress and hurting that we are made aware of the presence of God. Our self–imposed blindness often keeps us from seeing God and our need for Him until something breaks. The tragic, painful times in our lives often demand that we be aware of God and His presence.

However, it is not only the tragic times that demand that we open our eyes to God. I have two children and was honored to witness the births of both. Before they were born I thought I had this Dad thing down pat. I had read the books and taken the classes. How hard could it be? But then I witnessed the births of my children and what I saw is difficult to describe. To watch the woman you love suffer the pain to bring a life into the world, and then to watch your child nurse at her mother's breast. I held that tiny life in my hands and suddenly my heart crashed to my knees. How unworthy I felt to have fathered this child. How incapable I felt of nurturing this child in the midst of such an evil world. It was then that I realized again the depth of God's forgiveness and the power of His grace to transform my life into something that could give praise and honor to Him. To have eyes to see, we sometimes need to be shaken up.

Further, we learn from Isaiah that seeing God results in humility. This is what happened to Isaiah when he beheld the goodness and holiness of God. He was made to see his own sinfulness. In the same way, God wants us to see ourselves for what we really are and then allow Him to change us into what He has destined us to become. We must find the courage to look hard and fast at our brokenness instead of that of someone else. Uzziah lost his throne because of his pride. May we not lose our lives because of ours.

Seeing God also means that we understand that it is He who is transforming us. We cannot transform ourselves through any self–help program. It is only through the reconciling, sin–purging activity of God that we have life and are changed. Isaiah did not purge his own sins. It was God who sent the seraph to Isaiah, making him new. None of us is worthy of what God has done for us.

I want to see God, and in wanting to see Him I sometimes envy Paul and Isaiah. It seems that their vision of God was so clear. The symphony of the Savior's love is playing and my eyes are being trained to stay fixed on the Conductor. I am learning to see God in the ordinary and in crisis, because both will come. And in seeing Him I am humbled, seeing the reality of my own sinfulness. I see that it is only the power of God that can that can take away that sinfulness.

And I see that I need to listen for His voice and obey His command, for I am His.

Oh God, may we see your mighty acts in an ever changing world. May we be humble and may we be made into new creatures because of the way you have shown yourself to us in your Son. Father, may we have eyes to see your glory.

Vernon Dugger serves as associate minister for the Sylva Church of Christ. He can be contacted at PO Box 101, Sylva, NC 28779.

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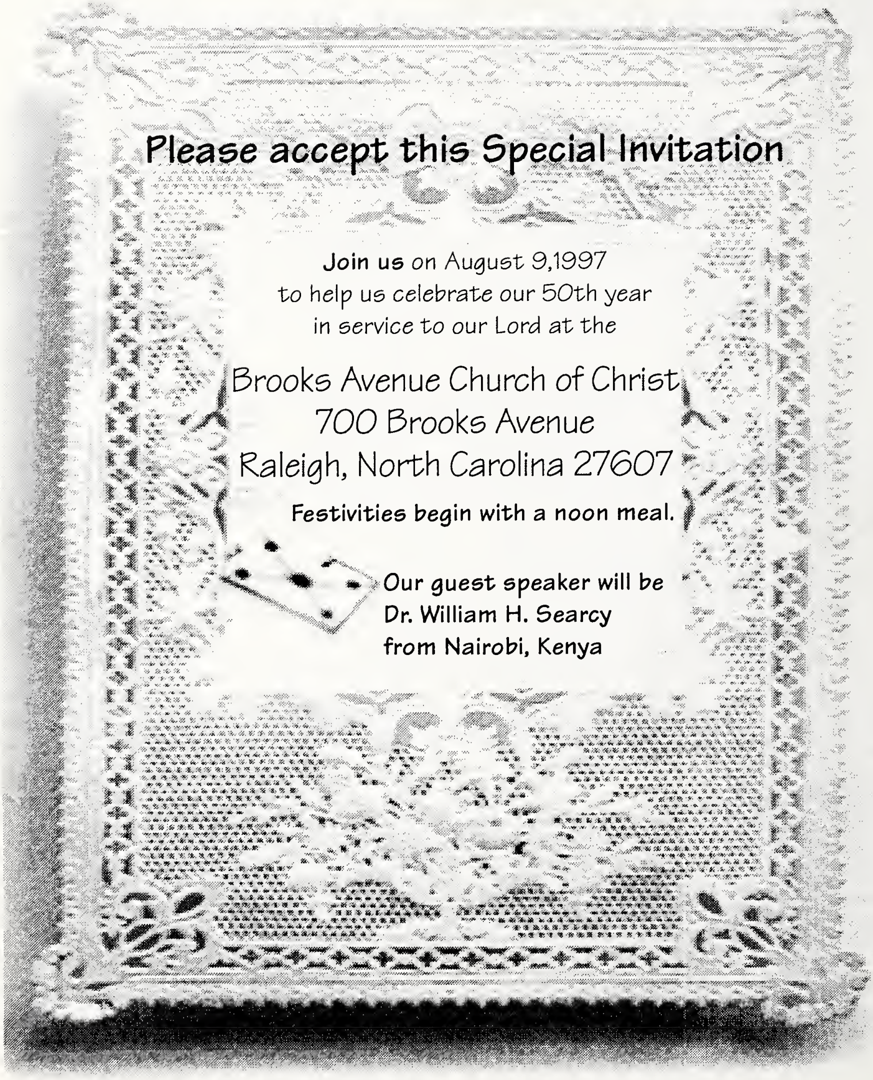

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Taking the Bible For Granted

DENNIS CONNER

Just a few days ago I returned from my third campaign trip to Ukraine. For the third time I am reminded of how Christians in America take so much for granted, especially the Bible itself.

This campaign took us to the small town of Khartszysk (pronounced *Hartsisk*), a town of 100,000 people in the coal mining region of eastern Ukraine. We went with the intention of establishing a new congregation there. Prior to the campaign there were only four members of the church who were meeting when they could. Bible studies with hundreds of people produced seven baptisms with the prospect of many more in the weeks and months ahead. Each commitment to Christ was heartwarming, and there were other stories that were heart convicting. Each of those stories served to remind me personally of how little the Scriptures are appreciated by so many of us.

The very first person to come to the first class on Monday was a man in his 50's. He came into John Kachelman's class with a simple request—he just wanted to hold a Bible. He said that he had never seen a real Bible before, and he just wanted to hold one for a few moments. John handed him a copy of the Bible in Russian and the man stood there for awhile with the Bible in his hands, savoring every moment. I wonder how many Bibles there are in the home of the average Christian family? And I wonder as well how many moments are actually spent with the Scriptures, much less savored.

Two teenage girls came into one of my classes on Tuesday afternoon. They were both schoolmates in the eighth grade and had walked some distance to come to the class. A complete Bible in Russian was placed on the table in front of them. I asked, "Do you have a Bible at home?" "No," they answered. "Well, you have one now," I replied. The girls looked at each other and then at me, asking incredulously, "We can take these home with us?" "Yes," I said, and their faces lit up like children at Christmas. They left the study an hour later clutching their new Bibles to their chests, barely believing their good fortune.

It had been announced all week long at the evening lectures that Bibles would be given away following the evening lecture on Saturday. That Saturday evening saw the largest evening attendance of the week, nearly 100 people. Before the lecture began the Bibles were handed out. People for the most part remained in their seats, but eager hands were thrust forth to receive a wonderful gift, the word of God. Some reached across others to be sure they received a Bible. Anxious children would occasionally run up to those handing out the Bibles to be sure that they got one before all the Bibles were given away. Eyes sparkled, smiles filled faces, and heads nodded in genuine gestures of appreciation. For most all of these people, such an opportunity as this was simply unthinkable only a few short years ago. They were thankful for their Bibles.

Perhaps the most touching scene, however, happened on Monday following the final day of the campaign. A 75 year old woman, hobbled by a back injury nearly 40 years earlier, had been attending the Bible classes for most of the week, listening to the Scriptures being shared and explained. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Paul said. She visited the worship on Sunday and expressed her desire to become a Christian. On Monday this dear old woman walked a mile and a half to the swim center in order to be baptized into Christ! How much do you think she valued the word of God?

If I had a dollar for every time I have heard someone say (myself included) that we Americans take so much for granted, and that we don't realize how good we have it here, I could start an endowment fund for the publication of *Carolina Christian*! Still, the truth is inescapable. And in Khartszysk, Ukraine, I was convicted by the simple lives of those people who so obviously treasured the holy Scriptures of God. May God forgive us all of our ingratitude, and may we all likewise repent.

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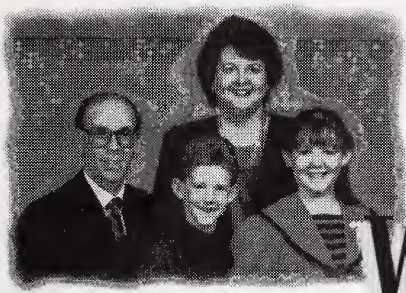

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Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

CHARLOTTE, NC... *Paul Jarrett*, preacher for the Archdale church for the past nine years, will be relocating to work with the church in Naples, Florida. Paul has been a great friend to preachers in the Carolinas, a hard working supporter of Carolina Bible Camp and AGAPE of NC, and a faithful servant of the Archdale congregation. We wish Paul and his wife Patty the very best in their new work.

MOCKSVILLE, NC... Carolina Bible Camp will be conducting two work weekends in preparation for this year's encampment. The dates are June 6-7 and June 13-14. Meals and lodging will be provided and there will be no registration fee. Just bring your tools and abe ready to enjoy some hard work and great fellowship.

KANNAPOLIS, NC... The second annual Ed Hill Singing Workshop, sponsored by the Kannapolis congregation, will be conducted August 29-30 at Carolina Bible Camp & Retreat Center. *Jack Thorn* of Ohio Valley College will return to conduct this year's event. Also, the congregation announces that they would like to make their preacher, *Kirk Sams*, available for a gospel meeting each year for as support to a mission area in the Carolinas. If you believe this would serve your needs and you would like to take advantage of this opportunity, please contact the church at 2315 Concord Lake Rd., Kannapolis, NC 28083.

CHARLOTTE, NC... The Providence Rd. church of Christ announces that *Jeff Walling* of Mission Viejo, California, will be their new pulpit minister. Brother Walling is expected to begin his ministry with Providence Rd. in June.

CHARLESTON, SC... "Homecoming at Essex Village: 40 Years of Progress" will be the theme of the fortieth anniversary of the Essex Village church August 29-31, 1997. An open invitation is extended to anyone who has worshiped with Essex Village since it was established in August of 1957. The homecoming celebration will be held over Labor Day weekend so that those traveling long distances will have Monday to return home.

Associate Editorial:

The Bible is Inspired

Jim Mullican

Probably all who are reading this article would agree with the statement in the title. The word used by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16 (*theopneustos*), which is often rendered "inspired," literally means "God–breathed."

Another passage that relates to the subject of divine inspiration is 2 Peter 1:20-21, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Two of the words used by Peter in this text are worth closer study. The word for "interpretation" literally means "untying," signifying that the men God used to write the Scriptures did not on their own initiative and by their own intellectual power untie the secrets of the future, the past or the present. God revealed the truth to them. Also, the word for "carried along" is the word used in reference to a sailing ship carried across the water by the wind in its sails. It's also used in Ephesians 4:14, where Paul cautions Christians not to be "blown here and there by every wind of teaching…," and in Acts 27:15, where the ship carrying Paul to Rome is "driven along" by the wind.

Thus, Peter says that the Old Testament writers did not make their own decisions and choices about writing, but the impetus came from the Holy Spirit. Examples of this prompting are seen in Exodus 24:4, where Moses wrote down what God had said, and Jeremiah 36:2-4, where God tells Jeremiah to write on a scroll all that God had said to him, and Jeremiah does so by dictating the words to Baruch the scribe.

It also seems obvious from studying the various inspired writings that God did allow each writer some freedom in how he expressed the message. For example, Matthew, Mark and Luke often record the same incident in slightly different ways, and each tells things omitted by the others. Further, they use terms which reflect their own personalities and backgrounds. In Luke, Jesus often speaks of the kingdom of God, but in Matthew's account of the same speech, he refers to the kingdom of heaven. This seems to reflect Matthew's Jewish upbringing and reluctance to use the name of God at all rather than risking a violation of Exodus 20:7. On the other hand, Luke, being a Gentile, had no such inhibition.

Likewise, the style and vocabulary of the writers come through in different ways. Students of New Testament Greek always begin their readings in the New Testament with John's writings, because he uses a simple vocabulary and style, almost like a reader for second–graders. This probably reflects his rural background, lack of advanced education, and the fact that his native language was Aramaic instead of Greek. Paul's style, however, is different from John's. When Paul quotes the Old Testament he usually seems to make his own translation from the Hebrew to the Greek, which is even different from the style of the writer of Hebrews, who always quotes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament made around the third century B.C. for Jews who lived outside Judea and spoke Greek as their native language). It was moreaccurately rendered in some passages than in others.

The evidence thus indicates that when God wanted to communicate His message

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to man, He provided the message but allowed His human messengers to write it in their own words and style.

He guarded their work against error, but allowed them some freedom in how they communicated His truth.

This accuracy resulting from inspiration by God applies only to the original writings. There is no evidence that God has inspired either later scribes who made copies by hand or more recent translators and printers who produced our English Bibles. Most are well aware of the shortcomings of Kenneth Taylor's *Living Bible Paraphrased,* which appeared in 1971, but every English translation has its strengths and weaknesses, including the long revered King James Version. Some of its renderings (such as "baptize" rather than the literal "immerse") were deliberately obscure in order to avoid offending the established Church of England, which practiced sprinkling.

Every English translation must be evaluated in terms of whether it relies on the oldest manuscripts—those closest to the time of the inspired originals—and in terms of how accurately it renders that inspired message into the language of the common man. That's the way God originally gave it, and that's the audience He wants to reach.

Jim Mullican can be contacted at P. O. Box 219, Clyde, NC 28721.

Lowell's Syndrome

Ron Newberry

Some months ago the scientific world was all abuzz over the reported discovery of what is believed to be signs of ancient life on Mars. Whether it proves to be true or not remains to be seen. However, it's not the first time such claims have been made.

Sir Percival Lowell, a highly esteemed astronomer, heard in 1877 that an Italian astronomer had seen straight lines criss-crossing the red planet. For the rest of his life Lowell peered through a telescope mapping the channels and canals of the Martian surface. Here was the proof he needed to convince the skeptics that life had existed on Mars.

Of course, since Lowell's time we have sent equipment to Mars which has shown that there are no canals. The entire surface has been mapped and there are no Martian made channels. How would Lowell have seen and diagrammed what he saw when in reality what he saw did not exist?

Two theories have been advanced: one, he wanted to see the canals so badly that he did see them; and two, we now know that he suffered from an eye disease which today bears his name. It is called Lowell's syndrome. The disease causes one to see the blood vessels in his own eyes. The Martian canals were nothing but the veins in Lowell's own eyes!

In Matthew 7:1-3, Jesus warns us about looking for specks in the eyes of others. We search for particles of sawdust in others while all the time ignoring the plank in our own eye. Guess what? We always find that fleck of debris.

> *"...Jesus warns us about looking for specks in the eyes of others."*

How is it that we always find the speck in the other fellow's eye? There are two possibilities: one, like Lowell, we may want to find flaws in others so badly that we actually see what isn't really there; and two, we may have the spiritual equivalent of Lowell's syndrome. What we may actually be seeing is the image of the plank in our own eye. Our own problems distort our view of the life of another.

In James 1:22-25, James describes the word of God as a mirror, not a telescope or microscope. We ought to be concerned about removing the planks we see reflected in the mirror that hinder our own view before we go probing for the specks in the eyes of our brothers and sisters. Surely that will brighten our entire field of vision and we'll see more clearly where to walk in our life in the Son.

Ron Newberry preaches for the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Breaking Down the Barriers

Peter Rode

When Jesus told His apostles in Matthew 28:18-20 to make disciples of all nations (literally, all ethnic groups), He meant that His followers would have to break down the walls their different ethnic cultures had erected and move into relationships with other people in whose company they might not feel very comfortable. Human walls could not be allowed to impede the progress of the gospel.

> "What walls are keeping us from sharing our faith? Do we need to move beyond our own comfort zone?"

When Luke wrote what the church was "scattered throughout...Samaria (Acts 8:1), a significant breakthrough had been made by God in the mindset of the church in Jerusalem and in the way evangelism was going to proceed. Prior to this time, the Christians lived in the familiar surroundings of Jerusalem where the church had begun and where they were comfortable. The church had exploded into existence on the day of Pentecost and had grown by leaps and bounds. They seemingly saw no need to go anywhere else. They might well have been content to stay there forever. It took a persecution to move them out of Jerusalem and into new territory—Samaria.

Samaria was definitely beyond their comfort zone. It was viewed as a place that all decent Jews avoided. Old Testament prophets denounced Samaria and Nehemiah knew enough about the Samaritans' character not to let them help with the building of the temple (Neh. 2:19-20). Samaritans were a mixed race both ethnically and religiously, and were therefore impure. Because of the long standing social and religious barriers between Jews and Samaritans, it was probably easy for the early Christians to imagine God as a wall–keeper!

But God pulled down the walls in Samaria. You see, He hates anything that keeps the gospel from people. Jesus had ordered His followers to be witnesses in Samaria (Acts 1:8), but it took persecution and the threat of death to get the young church to take Christ's wall breaking commission seriously.

Perhaps we have erected walls where they don't need to be. Perhaps we, too, have become comfortable within our fellowship group and don't feel the need to go and break down walls in order to evangelize. Perhaps we're in the same position as the Jerusalem church before it was scattered. What walls are keeping us from sharing our faith? Do we need to move beyond our own comfort zone? I hope it won't take a persecution to move us to break down walls and spread the good news. The gospel is the "power of God for the salvation of **everyone** who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16).

Let's challenge each other to break down the walls that people have erected and follow the example of the early church by preaching the word wherever we go!

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ and may be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Seeking to Serve God

Edward Brown & Chip Holton

On May 12, 1996, 144 people met in the cafeteria of the Nursery Road Elementary School in Columbia, SC, with the thought of beginning a new work in the Midlands of South Carolina. Following a worship service an organizational meeting was held, and thus began the Palmetto Church of Christ. It was evident that this was a group focused on God when more people attended the evening service that Sunday than the morning service.

The congregation is blessed with Christians who have a servant's heart. From the beginning there was no lack of people to take care of necessary responsibilities, including some who had not been active in this way before. In the absence of a full time preacher, 28 men have volunteered to fill the pulpit. A vital educational program was established (even though many teachers did not know from week to week where their classes would meet) and other committees were set up to handle the needs of the congregation.

While meeting at the Nursery Road School, we were basically a portable church! This meant having to set up and take down each time we met. There were many who set up and took down chairs, brought song books, hung the sign out front, brought supplies for the cradle roll class, set up the sound system, organized the worship, and made arrangements for fellowship meals. There was even a full day Vacation Bible School. There was much to do and there were many who were eager to do it!

As the summer progressed, the Lord blessed the church and our attendance averaged 180-190 on Sunday mornings. That meant that the next task was to find a more permanent location. The church had several options: rent another school, rent a building, or find a parcel of land suitable for purchase so that a building could be erected. We looked at several building, considered a land parcel, and explored other options, but to no avail. Little did we know that the Lord would provide an opportunity that had been right under our noses all along.

On August 27, 1996, a phone call was made to a denominational group that met at 7000 Nursery Road. Since the building apparently exceeded the needs of the people who met there, it was believed that there was a possibility that the building could be for sale. Approximately ten days later it was confirmed that sale of the property would be considered. A delegation was sent to inspect the facility and soon afterwards a presentation was made to the congregation. That same evening, over $80,000 was pledged to go toward a down payment on the building and an offer was soon made. Many fears accompanied the success God had given us. Would we raise enough for the down payment? Would a bank provide financing to a group only five months old without a charter, without formal leadership, and without a preacher? These fears were quickly laid to rest.

With much prayer and hard work, over $100,000 was raised in just two weeks! Not one, but five banks were interested in providing the financing needed. It was only 90 days from the first phone call to the closing on the land. We met for the first time for mid–week service on Tuesday, November 26.

The Palmetto Church of Christ has been blessed to see God work in so many ways in and through so many people. There is hardly a day that goes by that another opportunity to do God's work is not provided. We are currently involved in several outreach programs, including an exciting opportunity at the University of South Carolina. There has even been talk of a Christian school in the Midlands of South Carolina. The members of the Palmetto church are excited about the future and the opportunity that God has provided.

In his letter to the saints in Philippi, Paul said in 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." The Palmetto Church of Christ has been witness to this sentiment in the last several months. We have been blessed with several baptisms and re-commitments to the Lord. We only ask for your prayers over the next few months as we work to appoint elders and search for a full time minister. We recently enjoyed an all time attendance high of 243 and we hope to continue to grow.

The address of the Palmetto Church of Christ is 7000 Nursery Rd., Columbia, SC 29212 and the phone number is (803) 781-0909.

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Palmetto Bible Camp: Celebrating 30 Years 1967-1997

Tim Thigpen

"In the beginning God created…" God's beginning for Palmetto Bible Camp —and all the blessings it would bring—was born from a problem. Carolina Bible Camp, which offered two weeks of camp each summer in serving both North and South Carolina, was full and turning away campers. Proving again that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, this problem produced the beginning of PBC. In 1996 several CBC board members from South Carolina met together to plan for the establishing of another Christian camp to serve the needs of the young people of that state. The Lord directed their steps and PBC enjoyed its first encampment in 1967. From that time it has been a camp devoted to prayer and praise, watchfulness and thankfulness, and days full of rejoicing gladness with a whole lot of fun and laughter.

For the first three years state parks were rented as the Board of Directors and camp leadership continued to consider how to better encourage campers and staff to love and good works. In time God sent down showers of blessings and led PBC to a mountain it could call its own just north of Greenville, S.C., in the Blue Ridge foothills. These facilities have been extremely important to the development of PBC, but camp is about children. Children are a heritage from the Lord, a reward that He and parents have entrusted to PBC for the past thirty years.

In one week of camp all campers and staff will have the opportunity of more Bible exposure and teaching than most see in four months at home. We have studied every book in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We have watched David kill Goliath, Elijah defeat the prophets of Baal, and Jonah swallowed by and spit out of a large fish. Weeks have been spent listening to Jesus teach as we have watched Him walk on the water and have witnessed His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. God gave PBC success by sending some to be counselors, some to be nurses, some to be cooks, some to be lifeguards, and some to be teachers in helping to prepare God's children for His service.

Everyone who has a part in PBC has considered it pure joy when we have faced trials. And there have been trials: floods, a week when everyone caught the stomach virus, a broken bone or two, and many skit nights! Many have made decisions to commit their lives to Jesus, many have been led to turn their hearts back to their first love, many have been forgiven, many comforted, and many have been blessed by life–time friends who share a love that never fails.

Being careful to make the most of every opportunity, PBC has grown to offer six weeks of summer camp, an annual youth rally and Fall Singing. Many churches and groups rent the facility for their meetings and retreats (which can be done by calling 864-836- 6907).

God has shown those who have been any part of Palmetto Bible Camp the width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ. And for the past thirty years God has truly done more than we asked or imagined. Praise to the Lord! May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with Palmetto Bible Camp and all of God's people.

Tim Thigpen, a former board member and Camp Director for PBC, can be contacted at 807 Charbonneau, Columbia, SC 29210.

Right Motivation in Evangelism

WELLINGTON SMITH, JR.

With the right motivation behind our efforts in evangelism, the job will get done. Whenever evangelism does not occur, lack of motivation (or in some cases, improper motivation) is always at the root of the problem! What is motivation?

As defined by Dennis Waitley in his book, *The Joy of Working*, "Motivation is an inner drive, an idea captured in the imagination ...Motivation can be harnessed to an intense drive toward a goal...Men and women who are motivated push themselves forward, plow through the inevitable setbacks, heading ever onward to their dreams ...Motivation is essential to succeeding in any endeavor you try."

"And what should be our motivation in evangelism? Well, what motivated Jesus?"

The Steam That Drives the Train

Motivation is like "steam." Properly channeled it can move large objects, like a steam powered train. But without it, the train remains motionless. All the careful construction in preparation for travel is for nothing if there is no steam to propel the train.

So it is with us. If motivated and properly channeled, great things can be done in the area of evangelism. Unfortunately, many people, despite all of the spiritual education they have received on the subject of evangelism, still do very little with what they know. The reason? Lack of proper motivation!

And what should be our motivation in evangelism? Well, what motivated Jesus? Certainly He was successful in reaching His goals. Since He is to be our example, whatever motivated Him should be the motivating force driving His disciples. I can identify at least five things which moved our Lord. The first was...

Compassion For Lost Souls

Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw the mass of lost souls (Mt 9:35-36; 14:14; 15:32). Such compassion motivated Him to do two things. First, to ask His disciples to pray that God might "send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt 9:37-38). Then, to do something about it Himself; that is, to select and send out His apostles (Mt 10:1, 5-7).

Do we ever find ourselves filled with compassion for the lost? And doing something about it? If we can only have this same compassion for lost souls, we will not rest till we are doing something to save their souls!

How can we develop, or strengthen, this compassion for lost souls? The best way is *let God teach us to love*, as He did with the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:9). This He does through the example of Christ (1 John 3:16-17). I am suggesting, therefore, that the more we meditate upon God's love for us as manifested in His Son's sacrifice, the more we will come to love others!

It also helps to *be around people*. To love people, you have to get to know them. When we do, we can begin to appreciate the saying attributed to Will Rogers, "I never met a man I did not like." So beware of becoming "wrapped up in your own little world." Remember that Jesus was one to become involved with "the multitudes."

Have we allowed the love of God to fill our hearts with compassion for the multitude of lost and dying souls? Are we making an effort to be around people and getting to know them?

Jesus also had...

A SENSE OF PURPOSE

This motivating force is seen in our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. While speaking with her, his disciples marveled at what His motive might be (John 4:27). Jesus explained that it was, "To do the will of Him who sent me...to accomplish His work" (Jn. 4:34). And what was the will of His Father? It was to save a lost and dying world; it was to "seek and save the lost" (Lk. 19:10).

This raises an important question for us. Do we have this same sense of purpose in our own lives? Is our purpose in life the doing of the will of our Father? Different people, Christians included, have a number of different purposes in life. The workaholic makes his or her career the purpose in life. Others make family, friends, pleasure or hobbies the purpose for living. However, as we search the will of God, we learn that the most noble purpose in life centers around the proclamation of the praises of Him who has called us to be His special people (1 Pet. 2:9-10). One way we do this, of course, is through evangelism. But is this, in fact, our purpose in life? If not, our motivation for evangelism will be inadequate.

Another force that moved our Lord was...

THE LOVE OF THE FATHER

Jesus had experienced "the love of the Father," which in turn prompted Him to love others (Jn. 15:9). This love was such that Christ wanted to actively share it with others, even if it was necessary for Him to go to the cross to make it possible.

Have we experienced the love of the Father in our own lives? If so, how can we not be moved (motivated) to want to share it with others? Is it not worth sharing? Of course it is! But if we must confess that our love is not as strong as we would like, then how can we develop a greater sense of God's love for us?

One way to express our love for the Father is to be obedient to the commands of Jesus (Jn. 14:21, 23). A most important command in this regard is the one to love one another as Christ has loved us (Jn. 15:12). This is because loving one another is crucial to experiencing the love of the Father in our lives. As John wrote, "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us" (1 Jn. 4:12).

Another way to increase our experience of the Father's love is to make our love for Jesus stronger. The Father's love for us is directly related to our love for Jesus. Jesus said in John 16:27, "For the Father Himself loves you, because you love me..." And how can one increase in love for Jesus so that the Father's love might be experienced? The best way is to spend time with Him in the Scriptures which reveal Him.

So, have we experienced the Father's love by loving Jesus obediently? If not, we will not have much that is worth sharing, much less the motivation to share it!

We can also add to our list of the things that motivated Jesus...

THE TERROR OF THE LORD

Jesus was very much aware of God's righteous indignation. He taught that we should fear God and warned of the judgment to come (Mk. 9:43-48). Knowing the "terror of the Lord," Jesus was willing to go to the cross so that sinful man might be saved. Christ was willing to make that sacrifice so that sinners would not have to experience for themselves the just and righteous anger of God over sin.

Are we willing to make every effort to save others, as Jesus did? We may not have to die for them, but are we even willing to speak to them? Or could it be that we don't take the "terror of the Lord" as seriously as Jesus' disciples did?

How can we develop a healthy appreciation for the anger of the holy and righteous God over sin? Again, a frequent meditation upon the word of God is the place to begin, particularly those passages that describe God's judgments in the past (2 Pet. 2:4-9) and those that provide warnings of the day of judgment to come (2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 20:12-15, 21:8).

Have we, like so many, become complacent to the fact that there will be a day of judgment and condemnation for those separated from God? Could it be that we have not let the word of God have its true affect on our lives? A lack of concern and involvement in trying to reach the lost for Christ would certainly imply that this is the case.

Finally, we see that the Lord was moved by...

THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM

As expressed by the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 12:2, Jesus was motivated by the joyful prospect of being with His Father. The writer clearly indicates that it was this anticipated joy that enabled Jesus to "endure the cross" and "despise the shame." This joy gave Jesus the strength and incentive to become our sacrifice for sin in carrying out the Father's will.

Does not the prospect of spending eternity with God move us to do what we can to save those who are lost? It must if we also are to be willing to "endure the cross" or "despise the shame" that might be involved as the cost of evangelism. To increase our appreciation of what lies ahead for the faithful, I recommend that we regularly contemplate that which God has prepared for us. Picture heaven and all of its joys and wonders. Meditate on those scenes described in such passages as Revelation 7:13-17 and 21:1-7.

Further, it also helps to think of what God will do for those we reach with the gospel. Paul asks in I Thessalonians 2:19, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?" His answer is that it is the thought of the Thessalonians standing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. The prospect of their experience of the eternal presence of Christ was his "glory and joy" (I Thess. 4:20). I am sure that thought helped Paul to press on in teaching others about Christ.

CONCLUSION

Since Christ is the author and finisher of our faith, we should be "looking unto Jesus" for the motivation we need to do His will. We should consider Him, lest we become weary and discouraged. I am convinced that the early church looked to Jesus and found in Him the needed motivation to grow as they did. And I also believe that we can do the same today.

It should be apparent by now that the key to developing and strengthening the proper motivation is to let the word of God have its intended affect upon us. However, if we neglect to spend time consistently in the Scriptures, studying and meditating, then how can we ever hope to bemotivated like Jesus, Paul and the early church?

May we allow God's word and the example of Jesus Himself to motivate us in evangelizing the lost!

Wellington Smith, Jr., preaches for the Walkup Ave. church in Monroe, NC. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 2106, Monroe, NC 28110.

A Word of Warning to Model Christians

PAUL JARRETT

Growing up in the church in the early 1960's, I was pretty much a model teenager. I had no rhythm so I wasn't tempted to dance. I couldn't swim, so I wasn't tempted to engage in mixed swimming. I couldn't stand the smell of beer, so I wasn't tempted to drink. I was playing basketball and running track, so for the sake of my lungs I wasn't tempted to smoke. Since most sermons to young people emphasized the sins of dancing, mixed swimming, alcohol and tobacco, I was, as I said, a model teenager.

> "I have come to realize that I am good at resisting those temptations which do not tempt me!"

As I approach the age of fifty I am finding that those temptations I have had to deal with over the years are becoming less and less of a problem. I would like to think it's because I am becoming stronger spiritually, but to be honest I suspect it is more a testimony to the fact that I am becoming older physically. I further suspect that this will become more true as I move more deeply into those years when, in the words of Solomon, "desire fails" (Eccl. 12:5, KJV).

In reflecting on what I have just shared with you, I have come to realize that *I am good at resisting those temptations which do not tempt me*! I have not always been as successful when it comes to saying no to those things which do tempt me. While I would like to feel I have overcome more temptation than I have yielded to, I must confess that I have sinned.

There is, however, one temptation which I would like to think I have been able to resist. It is the temptation to become self–righteous; to look with contempt on those who are guilty of sins I would like to think I would never commit. If you are tempted to become self–righteous, it might help if you would ask yourself these questions: (1) Am I condemning others for something I have never been tempted to do myself, and (2) How successful have I been in overcoming those temptations which do tempt me?

If you find you are only succeeding in resisting those sins which never tempt you in the first place, perhaps it will help you to see that none of us can throw stones. We are all sinners in need of God's grace—just for different sins.

Paul Jarret currently resides at 1824 Tamworth Dr., Charlotte, NC 28210. In June he will be undertaking a new ministry in Naples, Florida.

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Witnessing For Christ

J. T. WHEELER

What is a witness to you? Someone who can testify to the facts under consideration first hand, correct? If he cannot speak from personal experience to the facts at hand, he is not a reliable witness, no matter how intensely he believes those facts.

What is a witness for Christ? Well, it helps to determine what facts we want considered about Christ. If we are simply talking about what Jesus has done for me, then certainly I am an ample witness to those facts. But interestingly, my testimony could be overturned bythose of another faith who could speak just as eloquently to the benefits of Christ on their own behalf. And what of the Buddhist, Moslem, or Hindi? Could they not testify to the goodness of their own experience in their religion? And would not their testimony tend to overshadow the uniqueness of my own? Shirley McLaine certainly speaks in glowing terms of reincarnation and the benefits she has reaped from discovering her own godhood.

As with everything else, let's turn to the Bible concerning this. The Bible has much to say about testimonies and testifying. The classic passage is Acts 1:4-8:

"And being assembled together with them (the apostles, TW), *He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' "*

Jesus lets us know some very important things here in terms of witnessing or testifying for Him. First, this discussion is to the apostles He Himself handpicked while on earth (Acts 1:2). Second, it takes power to be His witness (Acts 4:33). Third, this power would come from being baptized, or immersed, in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 5:32). And what were the facts to be validated by this witness? Let Peter answer: *"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection"* (Acts 1:21-22).

Notice how a disciple of Jesus does not necessarily mean you are a witness? No, the Lord must pick from two disciples would be witness with the other apostles. He is not a witness until then. And did you notice the fact in evidence? Nothing less than the **resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!** *"And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem,* *whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised upon the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who are and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the death"* (Acts 10:39-42).

This apostolic testimony is objective, first hand, and totally unique. It is that which only the apostles of our Lord can deliver—the objective, historical truth of the death, burial, resurrection and exaltation of the Son of God, which of course is the gospel and the one power which can save us (1 Cor. 15:1-11).

There is also the testimony of the Old Testament to be understood as corroboration of the apostolic witness (Acts 10:43), and the miracles accomplished by the apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name to further demonstrate the truth of their testimony (Mk. 16:19-20; Heb. 2:3-4). Now maybe you are different, but none of these evidences include me. I cannot be a witness to what is beyond my experience. I know Jesus lives and rules, and I know this not because of my witness, but because of the Bible (Jn. 20:30-31), the testimony of the whole counsel of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

To be sure, God's testimony is to live in me and be seen in me, but the witness is still God's, not mine (1 Jn. 5:9-11). It is the apostles who speak as witnesses of God for God, and we believe their testimony so that we can share their fellowship and joy—and hope (1 Pet. 5:1; 1 Jn. 1:1-4; Rev. 1:1-3).

Brother Wheeler preaches for the Westside church in Charlotte, NC. He can be contacted at 4463 Millbridge Dr., Charlotte, NC 28208.

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"I will sing
to the Lord
as long as I live,
I will sing praise
to my God
While I have my
being"
– Psalm 104:33

Church Spotlight: Brooks Avenue Church of Christ

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christian

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Editorial:

Called and Committed

DENNIS CONNER

The man tied to the stake at the center of the engulfing flames was old, unimpressive looking...and dangerous. His name was Polycarp, and the Romans feared him. The greatest empire the world had ever known fearful of a tired looking old man? Absolutely, and for good reason. They feared him enough that they tried numerous times, unsuccessfully, to get him to recant his faith in Christ. Polycarp steadfastly refused and it cost him his life, confirming the Romans' worst fears. His unrelenting commitment to Jesus Christ was a threat to the emperor worship of Rome.

> "In the committed life Jesus is not a priority, but *the* priority."

Polycarp and many others like him were making a difference in their world; their commitment was unflinching and radical by our modern standards. I wonder how much of a threat we today pose to the world around us? I wonder if the world even notices that we are here? What is the difference between the church then and now? Could it be the difference between their commitment and ours?

Two incidents early in the ministry of Jesus reveal the essential elements of Christian commitment. The first is the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John in Matthew 4:18-22. The text reads, "Now Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Then they immediately left their nets and followed Him. And going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him." The other incident is found in John 1:43-45, "The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow Me'...Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' " In these texts we find a composite of the essential and foundational traits of world–threatening commitment.

First, *commitment begins with Christ's call to man.* Though people often speak of their own search for God (and there may well be a sense in which it is appropriate to speak of our pursuit of God), yet it remains that our encounter with God actually begins with His call to us. Our relationship with the Lord is initiated by Him. He is the seeker, not us. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that God had called them by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Jesus said of Himself, "The Son of Man has come to *seek* and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, emphasis mine). And in both incidents above it was Jesus who sought out and called the Palestinian fishermen.

Someone might protest, "But what about those who flocked to hear Jesus preach? And what about Nicodemus and Zacchaeus, who obviously sought out Jesus?" What about them? Regardless of what was in their own minds, it was still Jesus who initiated the encounters by breaking into human history and coming into the world. Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, Peter, Andrew and every disciple since has simply responded to the seeking of God in Christ, a seeking that was ultimately demonstrated in the cross.

Thus, we might understand the call to commitment as an act of divine grace that necessitates our response and acceptance.

Second, *commitment to Christ requires radical obedience.* In his book *Dynamic Discipleship*, Kenneth Klinghorn writes, "Christ sets the agenda and makes the rules. He provides the contract and makes the stipulations. Christian discipleship is not a business arrangement between two equals…Christ is Lord; we are His subjects." Klinghorn is right. The relationship between Christ and the believer is that of Lord and subject, and in that relationship one of the key dynamics is obedience.

Christian commitment means that we never come to and serve Christ on our terms. Life–changing, world–threatening commitment calls for unquestioning obedience to the call and rule of Christ. It is fascinating to me that in neither of the two texts cited at the beginning of this article do we find even a trace of hesitation or skepticism when the call is issued. Peter, Andrew, James and John simply obey without question or hesitation. There was no attempt to define the terms of following; they accepted Christ's terms. To be sure, they would have their difficulties and failures over the course of the next few years, but in time their obedience to Christ became so radical and complete that it affected all of human history.

Is it unreasonable to expect such obedience? Polycarp didn't think so.

Further, *commitment is a way of life.* When those men responded to Jesus' call to follow, their lives would never again be the same. From that day forward everything would be changed. With that first step each of them began a new life. When those men laid down their nets they were abandoning one way of life and taking up another.

Too many in the modern church have failed to grasp that commitment is more than external rituals and token efforts. It is more than "church going" and involvement in programs. It is an all–embracing way of life in which the believer is consumed with Christ. In the committed life Jesus is not a priority, but *the* priority. I do not hesitate for a moment to call genuine Christian commitment an obsession. That may smack of radicalism and extremism to some. If so, let it smack! Anything less will not cause so much as a ripple in the world.

Finally, *commitment centers in the person of Jesus Christ.* We are committed not to some*thing*, but to some*one*. The call as issued by Jesus was to "Follow *me*." They were called to follow Jesus. And why did they lay down their nets and follow Him? Because of His keen intellectual prowess? No. Because of His remarkable powers of reason? No. Because of His miracles and healings? No, they hadn't seen any yet. Then why did they get up and follow after Him? Because they believed He was the prophesied Messiah, the Christ. They followed Him because of who He was, and rightly so. When we are converted, we are converted to Jesus Christ. He is the focus, the substance, the center, the reason. Anything else results in something less than a committed Christian.

They weren't perfect, those early disciples, but they were committed. And the world was never the same because of it.

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Brooks Ave. Church of Christ Celebrates 50 Years of Service

Glenn & Fran Holland

This year the Brooks Avenue Church of Christ in Raleigh, NC, celebrates 50 years of evangelism! Over that period of time the church has worked hard, faced many struggles, prayed long, and shed many tears; but through all the trials the Lord has blessed our efforts and given us success in almost every evangelistic field we have chosen. An integral part of the church's ministry has been the annual North Carolina Evangelism Seminar, which for 26 years has stood as a beacon for sharing the gospel of Christ throughout the Carolinas and Virginia. In this, our 50th year of evangelism, that beacon shines brighter than ever!

The Brooks Avenue church began in June of 1947 when seven people met at the YMCA on the campus of North Carolina State College (now University) to form a congregation which has now grown to approximately 650 members. Assemblies were held in a room at the old Andrew Johnson Hotel with attendance at those early assemblies averaging 20-25. Beginning in 1948, and continuing for a couple of years, letters were mailed to congregations all over the country asking for financial assistance for the church. Congregations in Oklahoma opened their hearts and pocketbooks to this new ministry—one even emptied its treasury.

The first gospel meeting was held in 1948 with Lindsey Allen preaching and soon afterward people began commuting from surrounding communities and towns. It wasn't long before we could see the possibility of securing a lot and building our own meeting house. The first building was completed in September, 1951, at the corner of Brooks Avenue and Rosedale Street at a cost of $35,000 for the land and building. The attendance by that time had increased to approximately 60. The original building seated 150 and had four classrooms. Bob Sorrell was the first preacher in the new location. The present building was completed and occupied in August of 1977. In the fall of 1995 construction began on a classroom and multi–purpose addition. With the present classrooms bulging and the need for a large space for fellowship activities, the opening of this addition in February of 1997 was enthusiastically welcomed.

Through the years the Brooks Avenue Church of Christ has experienced many challenges to both numerical and spiritual growth. We have rejoiced and wept *together*. Although there have been peaks and valleys, these challenges have been met with a determination by members and leaders alike to stand firm in Christ.

There have been many good men through the years who have had a part in leading the Brooks Avenue congregation. Elders, past and present, have included: Hubert Addams, Henry Reynolds, Dave Pullias, Ebern Watson, Clyde Cherry, Al Bergeron, Alton Holland, Harold Lile, Bob Lowery, Don Moore, Jack Harris, Leonard Smith, Ed Woodhouse, Adam Hudson, Ed Hauser, Ed Warner, David Mills, Dan Blazer, Ray Brock and Finis Cavender.

Those who have served as pulpit ministers include: Alan Marshburn, Otis Castlebury, A. F. Waller, Robert Sorrell, Sidney Astin, Bob Carrell, Bill Shelton, Olan Hicks, Max Miller, Jim Wyndham, Al Bergeron, Bill Turner, and our present minister, Ross Thomson.

Through the years Brooks Avenue has also conducted an active, successful campus ministry. Campus ministers have included:

Kent Brand, Charles Kiser, Wyndham Shaw, Dan Allison, Phil Pugh, Doug Vance and Bailey Forrest.

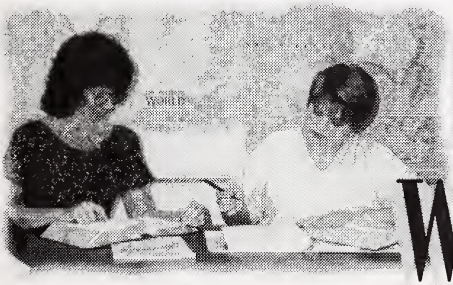
Youth ministers who have served the church are: Martin Bentley, Dan Allison, Benny Weast, Mike Gifford, Brian Knoerl, Gregg Smith, Dale McCorkle, and our present youth minister, Eddie Field.

Others who have served Brooks Avenue with special works have included: Ernie Stewart, David Riggs, Mike Dublin and Andy Peddycord.

From its beginning Brooks Avenue has been involved in mission work and church plantings in North Carolina and throughout the world. Just as Christians from across the country helped it in its infancy, Brooks Avenue seeks to be leaven for Christ from the shores of Kitty Hawk, NC, to the shores of Honduras in Central America. Thus, 1997 has been designated "A Year of Evangelism," encouraging all to tell the good news to our neighbors down the street.

August 8-10 the church will again host the North Carolina Evangelism Seminar. During the weekend we will also celebrate with a 50th anniversary homecoming. Former members who may be reading this article are exhorted to make plans to attend! We simply cannot have a homecoming without YOU! As Brooks Avenue ages and our older members pass on, it seems appropriate to pause at 50 years and reflect. To God be the glory!

For more information about the homecoming contact Glenn or Fran Holland at 701 Shadywood Lane, Raleigh, NC 27603; or call the church office at (919) 821-2400.



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A Farewell Message

PAUL JARRETT

By the time you read this in all likelihood I will be a Florida resident. After nine years in the Carolinas my wife, Patty, and I will be moving to Naples, Florida to work with the Naples Church of Christ.

When I moved to North Carolina in March of 1988 I knew only a handful of people, having previously labored for churches in Ohio and West Virginia. When I leave North Carolina I will leave with a wealth of friends and good memories. In coming to this beautiful state Patty and I were fulfilling a desire that had been born as a result of our having attended "Wonderful" Blue Ridge Encampment in the late '70's and early '80's. The dream we had of living and working in this region has been better than we had ever anticipated. We will miss the marvelous blend of sights and seasons God has bestowed on the Carolinas.

> *"The truth is that while the flower of division may be seen in those differences which divide us, the root of division goes deeper than the question of who is right and who is wrong on any issue."*

When I moved to Charlotte I was impressed with several activities in which the churches in the Carolinas were involved. Among these were Carolina Bible Camp and Palmetto Bible Camp, AGAPE of NC, and this publication, *Carolina Christian.* I am thankful to say that over the past nine years I have had the opportunity to be involved with each of these good works.

I would like to think that I have made a positive contribution to the Lord's work in this region. While I may not have always succeeded, I have always desired to promote a spirit of peace and cooperation among the churches in this region. For example, I have always wanted this publication to be the kind of positive journal that could be given to new converts and non–Christians without hesitation. I am thankful that under Dennis Conner's capable leadership it is that kind of paper.

I believe that for the most part there is a spirit of love and unity among the churches in the Carolinas. However, I also know there are now and will always be those who sow seeds of controversy and discord. If their influence is to be opposed, we must first understand what lies at the root of all division. Then we must root it out of our own hearts before seeking to help others do the same.

The truth is that while the flower of division may be seen in those differences which divide us, the root of division goes deeper than the question of who is right and who is wrong on any issue. In fact, I would be so bold as to suggest that even those who are right can be guilty of promoting division.

This is so because of the nature of the root of division. The root of division is arrogance. As a result, when one is right one must resist the temptation to sow seeds of discord by the manner in which one holds his position. The means for overcoming this temptation is found in some select texts to which I would like to call your attention.

First, in I Corinthians 8:1-3 Paul observes that we all have knowledge. However, by itself "knowledge makes arrogant." It is only in the company of love that knowledge is able to edify.

Second, in Romans 15:1-7 Paul makes it clear that those who are strong (i.e., mature) evidence their strength by their acceptance of those who are weak. Whereas many today use their knowledge to limit their fellowship, Paul urges us to use our knowledge to edify an expanded fellowship.

Third, in James 3:13-18 we find what may very well be the most significant text in all of Scripture regarding how to preserve unity. The key is found in our coming to possess the wisdom from above. Where the wisdom of this world is characterized by the arrogance which produces division, the wisdom from above manifests itself in good behavior.

Finally, brethren, let me warn you that there will always be those (both "conservative" and "liberal") who wish to make a reputation for themselves for the sake of gaining a following. Those who do so are fleshly and should be avoided by those who are spiritual. Such men will be avoided by all who are dedicated to following Christ (see Romans 16:17-18 and I Corinthians 3:1-11).

We cannot resist those who are divisive by manifesting the same spirit which controls them. Rather, we must respond in the manner prescribed by Paul when he wrote these words of exhortation that I now commend to you:

"This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. But shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless" (Titus 3:8-9).

Editor's Note: Brother Jarrett will be greatly missed by his friends in the Carolinas. There is as little ego in Paul as any preacher I have known; consequently, he has been an encourager of men and a tireless promoter of the cause that surpasses all causes. We need more men like him and pray that God will richly bless his new ministry.

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Joe Cannon, Director, Highland St. Church of Christ
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Christian Motivation
(2 Corinthians 5:11-6:1)

TIM SENSING

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all…"

Central to Paul's thought concerning the love of Christ is the demonstration of that love on the cross. We have all sinned. All of us at one time were separated from God's holy presence because of our attitudes and actions. But no matter what we had done or what we had become, God loved us. Even though we deserved death, Jesus died for us. Since He died for us, we wereredeemed from our sin and reconciled to God. *"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* We are convinced that Jesus died for us out of His great desire to restore our position with God. In that conviction we find our motivation.

MOTIVATED TO WHAT END?

In this text Paul describes five consequences of our conviction that comes from the compelling love of Christ.

"…And therefore all died." For some, the natural next statement for Paul should have been "and therefore all live." And he will say just that in the next verse. However, in order to understand our new life in Christ, we must harbor no longings for our old life. We died. The old self was crucified with Christ. We were buried with Christ in baptism into death. We no longer live (see Romans 6 and Galatians 2:20).

"And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." We died, but we are not dead and gone. We have been raised with Christ in order to live new lives for God. We have been bought by the blood of Jesus and we are now owned by God. My stubborn will has been crucified along with its passions and desires. Self is no longer on the throne, but in bondage to righteousness. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer." Since we are convinced that Jesus died for all, and therefore all died, faith becomes our new perspective. Because we view Christ through faith, we no longer view ourselves from a worldly point of view. We are children of the King. We no longer view our church family from a worldly point of view. We are community. Love dominates our relationships. Every relationship we possess is now transformed by the love of Christ. We no longer view the lost from a worldly point of view. And how we view the lost is Paul's next concern.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." God has granted us an awesome responsibility. As the body of Christ, we sacrificially give our lives in ministry and service in order to bring others to Christ. We will wash feet, visit the prisoners, feed the hungry, care for the orphans, do justice, and embrace the poor for we have been given such a ministry. Jesus' ministry of reconciliation reached a zenith at the cross. Jesus' ministry of reconciliation will be consummated in us.

"And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God." Jesus not only

went about Galilee and Judea doing good, healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead; He also preached good news. Both the ministry and the message of Jesus empower us as His body to do likewise. Service and proclamation, ministry and message—you cannot have one without the other. Our ministry and our message is God, through us, making His appeal known to the world. Christ died in order that God's appeal would be made known and effectual. Will we follow? Christ's love compels us!

"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain."

Tim Sensing preaches for the Lexington church that meets at 649 Barr Rd., Lexington, SC 29072. He can be contacted at that address.

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Did You See That!

RITA WATSON

You must understand that I am not in any way a sports fan. I don't like to read about sports, I don't listen to sports on the radio, I don't watch sports on TV and I certainly don't participate in any sports. Above all else, I don't go to sporting events. Well, that is, I didn't until my son Joshua hit first grade. That was the year I first found myself sitting on a bench with a lot of other parents watching some very small children run up and down a soccer field! Since then I've learned some spiritual lessons from those fields of sport.

One lesson I learned has to do with serious sports spectators. First of all, the are very observant. They watch the game closely. They know who made what move. They can give you the players' stats and they know who is on which team. They are aware of what is going on even when it doesn't seem like they are. And if it's their child playing, their eyes never leave the field.

Another lesson I've learned is that sports fans are vocal. A number of years ago there was a phrase going around that said, "Worship is not a spectator sport." After sitting in the bleachers myself I have decided that the sentiment could be better expressed with this thought: "Worship is not an evening at the opera." For you see, sports spectators are not passive; they do not sit quietly and observe a performance. Rather, they cheer their team on. They yell for individual team members. They praise those plays that are well–done. They jump up and raise their hands in the air and shout "Yes!" They stomp their feet and whistle and dance in place. They say to each other, "Did you see that?"

It finally occurred to me that as observers of the glory of God it might serve us well to be more like serious sports fans in some ways.

For instance, we need to observe closely what God is doing in our world today. We need to be aware of His handiwork in the rising of the sun, the birth of a baby, the gracefulness of a deer, the beauty of a singing voice (Psalm 19:1-6; 33:4-9). We need to observe God moving in the lives of individuals as He orchestrates events so that wondrous things occur (Psalm 34:7; Genesis 39-41). We must look over history and see the finger of God at work in the nations (Psalm 33:10-22; Jonah; Esther) and remember that it is God who causes even today's nations to rise or fall. We must look toward the future expecting to see God at work (Psalm 21:8-13). We need to bring to our worship and service the same intense interest that the sports fan brings to the game.

Second, we should respond with enthusiastic praise to what we see God doing. Once we view Him in action we will find that there are times when the glory of God is so magnificent that we must jump for joy, run in place (2 Samuel 6:14; Psalm 149:3), shout it from the mountain tops and share it with everyone. There are times when no quiet pronouncement of what God has done will suffice. Rather, God's praises must be sung at the top of our voices (Exodus 15:20-21) and repeated over and over (Psalm 21)! We will then tell anew the old story, and we will do it with awe and enthusiasm! We will jump to our feet and say "Yes! Yes! Yes!" We will say to each other, "Did you see that?"

My point is simply that life before God cannot be lived passively and with disinterest. We have so much more to be excited about than a ball game…but are we?

Rita Watson can be contacted at 903 Oak St., Marion, NC 28752.

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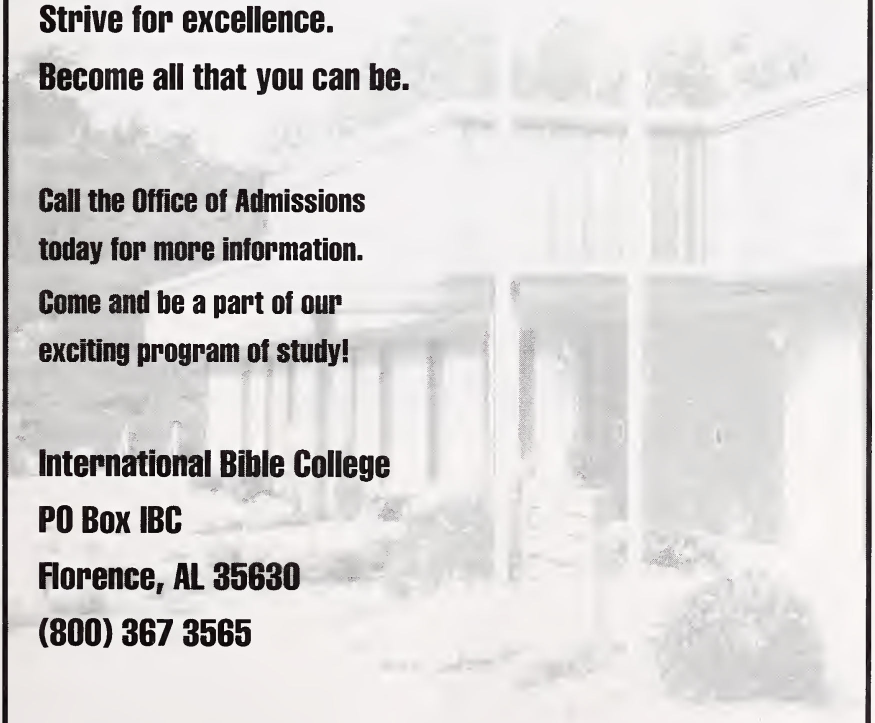

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Baptism: Two Becoming One

Peter Rode

Two little saplings grew side by side. Because of the action of the wind they continually crossed each other. In time the bark of each tree became wounded and the sap began to mingle, until one day they bonded together. As they grew, the stronger began to absorb the life of the weaker. One became larger and larger while the top of the other began to wither and die. Now, there are two trunks at the bottom and only one at the top. Death has taken away the one; life has triumphed in the other.

> "The goal of Christianity is to be transformed into the image of Jesus."

When we are baptized into Christ we became united with Him. As Paul put it in Romans 6:4-7, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." The word translated "united" here is the word used for grafting a limb into a root stock. It was at this point in our lives (baptism) that we surrendered our lives to Christ and died to self. In the words of Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Unfortunately, however, although we make the good confession and go through the action of being immersed into Jesus, we sometimes want to take back our lives. We're supposed to be joined together, having given our lives to Him, and we're supposed to be like the two saplings in the story—two trunks which have grown together to become one—but in practice this doesn't always happen. In reality, our lives run parallel with each other, there is no contact, and, therefore, no infusion of the one with the other.

How do we find out if this is the case or not? The best and quickest way is to ask yourself, "Does my life show more and more of Christ's characteristics and less and less of my old sinful self?" The goal of Christianity is to become transformed into the image of Jesus. The only way we can do this is by total surrender. Jesus said that we have to deny ourselves, take up the cross daily, and follow Him (Mark 8:34-35). It's that denying self part that's so difficult. It boils down to basically two things: we either haven't enough faith to trust God with our lives, or it's that we deliberately don't want to follow Christ fully because we think we can serve two masters. We want to do His will whenever it suits us, and we want to live our lives the way it suits us the rest of the time. In other words, we want to do as we please.

My prayer is that we you examine your life you will recognize an intertwining of His life with yours and that His characteristics are becoming the dominant ones. If they aren't, then I plead with you to surrender to Jesus. May the two become one.

---

*Peter Rode serves Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro and is a frequent contributor to **Carolina Christian**. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.*

The Poor Little Rich Church

Johnny Melton

By what standards do we measure the wealth of a church? There is no question that many today would measure the wealth of a church by the rate of numerical growth, the size of the budget, attendance, the grandeur of the building, the number of programs, etc. In other words, externals. Then how do we explain the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11?

> "In churches that demand radical commitment and obedience to Christ, the chaff will be driven away and the dross will be burned up."

By the world's standards the church at Smyrna would be judged weak and ineffective. Perhaps they might be given an honorable mention for their efforts, but really, in the final analysis, the world would judge that congregation to be embarrassingly unimpressive. But not Jesus. To those looking at the church from the outside, Smyrna appeared to be a poor little church. But listen to Jesus' pronouncement in Revelation 2:9, "I know your afflictions and poverty—yet you are rich." What did Jesus see in Smyrna that we so often fail to see?

First, *Smyrna was poor in prestige but rich in courage*. He who died and came to life again said, "I know your afflictions." The saints there had been hated and hounded. They had been vilified and slandered by their enemies. The Christians in Smyrna were hated by the Romans because they would not worship Caesar. They were hated by the Jews because they taught the Lordship of Christ (the Christ the Jews rejected). Persecution against the church was active and Jesus indicated that it was only going to increase ("Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer," verse 10). Yet, in the face of affliction and persecution, Smyrna remained faithful. She did not compromise her identity in a quest for respectability, and that took courage.

Second, the church at Smyrna was *poor in power but rich in strength*. The church could bring no political pressure to bear upon its enemies and detractors. There were no friends in high places who could order a stop to the persecution. The church had no clout. Physically they had lost much of their wealth, their liberty and no doubt some had even lost their lives. There was no power as the world measures power, but there was strength. There was the strength to endure, and that strength was possessed in abundance.

Sometimes the modern church trades strength for power. There are those who would like to see the church seek a position of power politically so that it can supposedly wield a greater influence in the world. However, power is not necessarily equivalent to spiritual strength. The church may never be powerful, but if we are strong in the strength of the Lord and remain faithful to our calling in the face of all afflictions and obstacles, then that will be all that really matters.

Further, the Smyrna church was *poor in* *money but rich in blessings.* As Jesus acknowledged, "I know your...poverty—yet you are rich." One of the problems of the second–generation church was the issue of emperor worship. In order to buy and sell one had to burn a pinch of incense once a year and say, "Caesar is Lord." There were many who reasoned that if they didn't really mean it, they could say it and still be faithful. But not at Smyrna! The disciples there would not accept that kind of compromise. They were zealous for their faith and refused to hide their faith. Their poverty could be directly related to their conviction and commitment. Because they were committed to Christ as Lord, and not Caesar, they paid the economical price. Christian merchants were stripped of their licenses. Believers could not freely roam the marketplaces. Christian families suffered economic deprivations.

Their faithfulness in the face of poverty, however, would not go unrewarded. Jesus promised the persevering believers "the crown of life." It would be a crown of victory, a crown of joy, a crown of honor. Their faithful investment in the present would yield immeasurable dividends of future and eternal glory.

Finally, the church was *poor in size but rich in zeal and commitment.* Historically the church in Smyrna was relatively small. Persecution tends to have that affect on a church. It weeds out the fainthearted and uncommitted.

Some churches today, in the zeal to build large ministries, may yield to the temptation to compromise doctrine and moral purity. It is one thing to be sensitive to culture; it is quite another entirely to accommodate culture. Such churches may get along with the beggarly elements of the world and may build a large membership, but they also risk the judgment of the Lord.

In churches that demand radical commitment and obedience to Christ, the chaff will be driven away and the dross will be burned up. The unconverted and the unconcerned will turn away. The church may be smaller, but it will be stronger.

Thus, contrary to all appearances, Smyrna was actually quite wealthy and blessed. It may not have had the approval of the world, but it had the approval of the Christ who ruled the world. The challenge posed for modern churches is quite clear and pronounced. By what standards do we gauge our success today? Whose approval are we seeking? Is it more important to us to be powerful or to be faithful? To answer these questions we need to look to Smyrna, the poor little rich church.

Johnny Melton is a former editor of ***Carolina Christian****. He currently serves the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, Mississippi. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 651, West Point, MS 39773-0651.*

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True Shepherds

Tom Torpy

"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves" (Ezekiel 34:2).

What an indictment! Why was God so angry with the shepherds (the leaders) of Israel? In Ezekiel 34:1-6 the prophet lists about a dozen reasons and in the process of itemizing the deficiencies of those shepherds, God set forth what shepherds ought to be doing.

What ought those shepherds to have been doing?

Shepherds should feed the sheep, care for the sick, bind the wounds of the injured, search for the lost, bring back the strays, and protect them from wild animals. The shepherds in Ezekiel's day had neglected these duties. Of course, Ezekiel was not just talking about literal shepherds and sheep, but about Israel's leaders and the Jewish people. No wonder God was angry!

This text raises an important question for the shepherds of the new Israel. What responsibilities does God want the "shepherds" of the church to discharge? The answer is little changed from the time of Ezekiel. Shepherds are to feed the spirits of the members with Bible instruction and the instilling of moral values. They are to care for troubled souls sickened because of familial, moral, financial, or other maladies that vex their spirits. They are to provide spiritual exercises to strengthen faith. They are to go out, look for and retrieve those who have put spiritual distance between themselves and the healthy, cared for sheep. And they are to be protectors of the sheep who are threatened by charlatans and godless people who would attack and destroy believers by destroying their faith.

> *"What responsibilities does God want the shepherds of the church to discharge? The answer is little changed from the time of Ezekiel."*

The good men who responsibly perform this work of God are to be honored and respected. They deserve our prayers and support. Other "shepherds" who long for control of the church andwhose primary aim is to run the church from closed–door meetings should find another outlet for their selfish ambitions. They, too, need our prayers. Pray for shepherds who look beyond themselves to the needs of the sheep. Pray for your shepherds.

Tom Torpy preaches for the Jericho Church of Christ in Mocksville, NC. He can be contacted at P. O. Box 354, Mocksville, NC 27028. This article originally appeared in **Daybreak** *magazine, a publication of the Hickory Church of Christ, and is reprinted with permission.*

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

RALEIGH, NC... The *Brooks Avenue Church of Christ* invites everyone to share with them their 50th Anniversary while you attend the annual North Carolina Evangelism Seminar August 8-10. For more information contact the church at 700 Brooks Ave., Raleigh, NC 27607; or call (919) 821-2400.

FLORENCE, AL... *International Bible College* announces its campaign to "Kindle the Flame." IBC is "Burning the Note!" on September, 1997. You can help to kindle the flame and recruit, educate, and encourage effective communication of the gospel. For more information call the college at 1-800-367-3565.

LITTLE ROCK, AR... Twenty–eight homes and a church building have been devastated by the recent flooding and tornadoes in the Ohio Valley and Arkansas. If you would like to help with the relief effort for the Hickory Ridge Church of Christ and the families, contact Tim Davis for labor support at (501) 697-2208, and for financial support the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief at 410 Allied Dr., Nashville, TN 37211. The Churches of Christ Disaster Relief phone number is (615) 833-7133.

DURHAM, NC... A new congregation has been established in Durham. The *Durham Church of Christ* is a traditional congregation of approximately forty members who believe in the uniqueness of the New Testament church as it was established on the day of Pentecost. They are currently meeting at 3647 Guess Road in Durham, about one mile north of I-85. Sunday morning Bible classes begin at 9:30 with worship beginning at 10:30. Sunday evening worship is at 6:00 and Wednesday Bible study begins at 7:00 p.m. Jerry Pence and Dale Morris, members of the congregation, are currently sharing the preaching responsibilities until the church is able to support a full time preacher. The mailing address of the church is 3647 Guess Rd., Durham, NC 27722 and the phone number is (919) 248-9695. For more information you can also contact Jerry Pence at (919) 383-6327, or Dale Morris at (919) 479-7303.

CHARLESTON, SC... "Homecoming at Essex Village: 40 Years of Progress" will be the theme of the fortieth anniversary of the Essex Village church August 29-31, 1997. An open invitation is extended to anyone who has worshiped with Essex Village since it was established in August of 1957. The homecoming celebration will be held over Labor Day weekend so that those traveling long distances will have Monday to return home.

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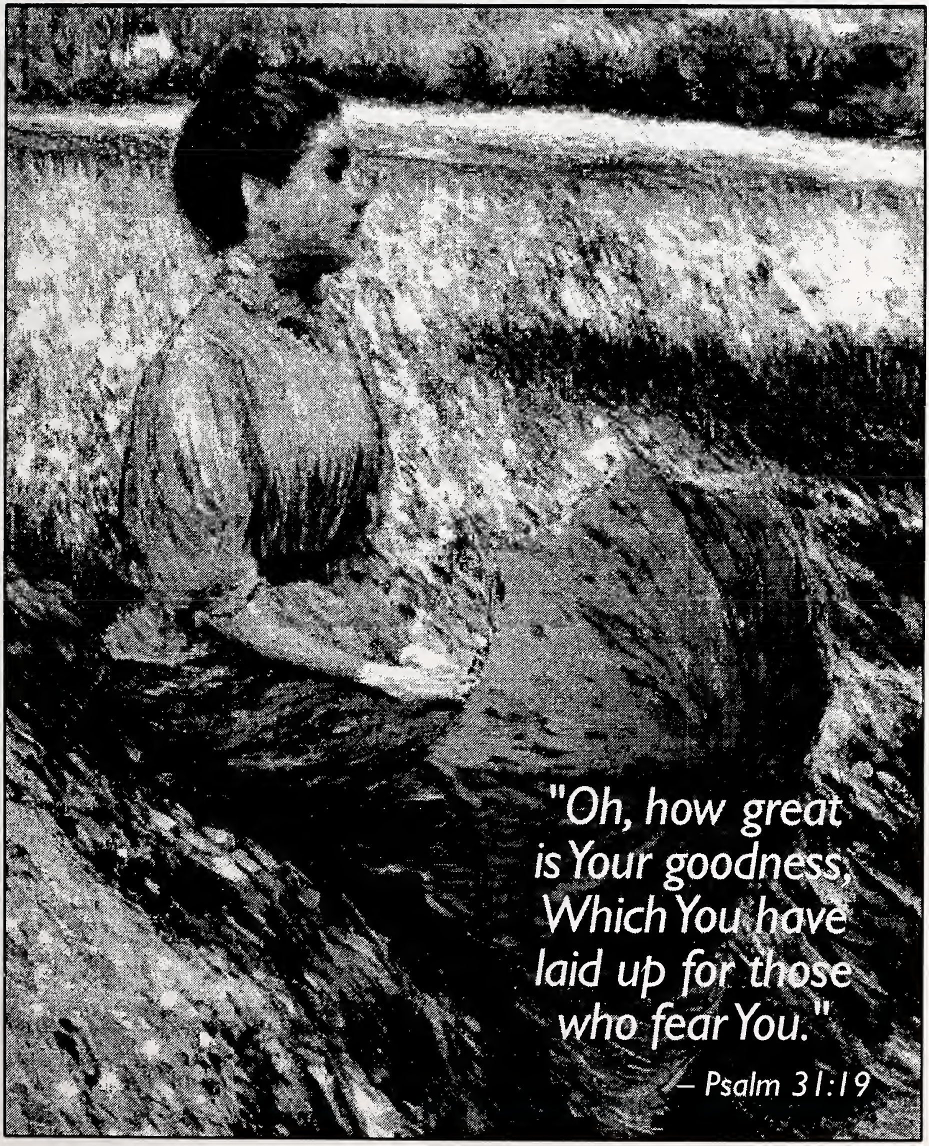

"Oh, how great
is Your goodness,
Which You have
laid up for those
who fear You."
– Psalm 31:19

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Editorial:

Tribute From the World

Dennis Conner

How is the modern disciple to live in an increasingly secular culture? That is a question the individual Christian struggles to come to grips with. For some the answer is accommodation. The culture is imbibed and the lines between disciple and world are increasingly blurred. For others the answer is isolation. Withdraw. Live the sheltered life. Try to escape or deny the realities of life in the world. Neither, of course, is a biblical option. And then for others—a minority of others, I fear—the answer is to live out one's convictions and commitment in the real world regardless of the world's response; and the world will have a response to the life of genuine commitment. Those in the world are often made uneasy by a real–world faith, but the world's uneasiness and criticism is for the Christian the most sincere form of tribute. Witness the life of Daniel in Daniel 6:1-11.

Circumstances had thrust Daniel into the center of the world arena, and it was a position he refused to retreat from. The world posed no threat for his faith; rather, his faith posed a threat to his world. He was surrounded by men consumed with political ambition and he represented a significant obstacle to their political agenda and ambitions. They plotted ways to undermine him politically, but nothing worked. They could find no fault in Daniel's character, so they seized upon his faith. They said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God." It wasn't that they expected to find some glaring flaw in Daniel's practice of his faith; rather, they hoped to use that very faithfulness — the predictability of his personal prayer and worship — to entrap him. In the acknowledgement of Daniel's faithfulness, we find two important lessons that are relevant to our own experience today.

First, *real faith flourishes not in isolation from the world arena, but in the very midst of the world.* Daniel's faith flourished in the midst of any and all circumstances, no matter how unfavorable, and he was able to keep himself unspotted by the world. Daniel was exposed to many powerful allurements and temptations — luxury, idolatry, political power, selfish ambition, status — but he remained consecrated to his God.

A paradox comes to light here: unfavorable circumstances can actually be the most favorable for the development of godly character. True faith does not thrive in a sterile environment. As Alexander McLaren once said, "You will always find that people who have any goodness in them, and who live in conditions usually opposed to goodness, have a clearer faith, and a firmer grasp of their Master, and a higher ideal of Christian life, just because of the foulness in which they have to live." That certainly proved to be true in Daniel's case. For Daniel, as for all believers, the benefit of the realities of life in the world is that they constantly drove him back to God reminding him of his need for the Lord. Dependence provides fertile soil in which faith may be nurtured and developed.

Second, we see in turn *the integrity and consistency of the life of true faith.* Daniel's adversaries deceived King Darius into passing a statute that forbade for thirty days the worship of any god other than Darius. Upon learning of this, Daniel went home and "with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days" (Daniel 6:10). Daniel's enemies centered their scheme on what they knew to be his regular and unalterable practice, and in doing so they merely acknowledged the consistency of his faith. They knew he would not change his prayer habits; as a matter of fact, they were banking on that in order for their plan to work. And sure enough, when they made their way to Daniel's home they found him exactly where they expected to find him — on his knees praying to God. That is the nature of a real-world faith. It remains consistent even in the face of adversity and opposition.

What do those in the world see and acknowledge about us? There are only two things for which the world might seek to criticize us: either our hypocrisy or our consistency. For which one might we be criticized? Those in Daniel's world knew they could count on him to obey his God no matter what. Here is a question to wrestle with. Can the world count on us to do the same? Can we be counted on to submit to the will of God no matter what the will of the world may be?

Quite unintentionally Daniel's worldly critics paid him a remarkable tribute, a tribute born of Daniel's refusal to either accommodate or deny the realities of his culture. In trying to find our own answers regarding our relationship to culture, we find in Daniel a model of how to live as a stranger in a strange land.

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Marks of Spiritual Maturity

Burl Curtis

The Holy Spirit admonishes us to go on to maturity. We read in Hebrews 6:1, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity..." (RSV). In the early stages of our Christian walk there are many things that are necessary to be understood and done, but growth means that our spiritual diet is not limited to those things. We are to move on; to grow. But what are some of the marks of spiritual maturity? How can we tell if growth is occurring?

> "The mature Christian has what every soul deeply longs for."

First, it is a mark of spiritual maturity when a believer comes to really understand that God is completely trustworthy. We may have trustworthy friends, but there are times when they are honestly mistaken or do not have the power to fulfill their promises. But not so with God. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and His promises never fail. Paul wrote, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:20). He has all power and knowledge so that He will not fail us. The more mature one becomes the more one is willing and able to rely on God.

Can you really "let all your weight down" on God? For many it is not easy to trust God completely. After Paul was stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:8-19) he probably had every reason to be psychologically scarred. And after going through other persecutions he evidently needed help at Corinth. The Lord appeared to Paul in a vision reassuring him, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you and no man will attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). The mature believer will worry less and less and trust more and more. One of the great blessings of faithful service to God is the certainty that God is completely trustworthy. You can depend upon Him.

Second, maturity is being happy with the care God gives you. It may be rather easy to say, "God takes good care of me," when we find ourselves in good health, prospering financially and other things are going well; but how about the dark, troublesome days? We have read and believe I Peter 5:7, "Casting all your cares upon Him: for He careth for you." We are also aware that God knows us so completely that even the hairs of our heads are numbered (Luke 12:7) and that not one sparrow is forgotten before God (Luke 12:6), but still it is hard to be satisfied with the care God provides when sickness, disease and hardship come. The more spiritually mature one is the more one will be happy with the care God gives in all the circumstances of life.

Third, it is a mark of spiritual maturity when we get over our love of money (I Timothy 6:10). It may be fairly easy to get away from some of our love for money, but how about giving up *all* our love of money. Some dodge that question by saying, "I don't love money; I just appreciate what it will buy." Honestly, is there really any difference? Followers of the Lord have financial responsibilities toward others (family, those in need, widows and orphans), but the fulfillment of these is due to a love for God rather than a love for money. Ask those who have gotten over their love of money how much happier, contented and better off they are.

Fourth, it is a mark of maturity to arise every morning with the thought, "How can I best serve the Lord today?" True, there are times when the immature ask themselves this, but those who are truly mature are conscious of it every day. All they want to do is the will of the Lord. Their constant prayer is "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Rest, recreation, work, prayer, study, assembly, service — all are wisely balanced with a view toward giving God glory in all things. The mature Christian does not have to look back on any day regretting all the time wasted sitting before the TV and being idle or tied up with things of lesser importance.

And finally, the mature follower of the Lord is certain of victory. As Paul wrote, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:57). John said, "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4). Peace settles in his soul like the quiet, clear water of a beautiful lake and joy flows into and through his life like a deep stream. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). And Peter wrote, "Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Peter 1:8).

It might be objected by some, "Wouldn't living a life like this make a person so heavenly minded that he would be of no earthly good?" Actually, the opposite is true. Such will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They will be the first to support world–wide evangelism to the limit of their ability and the first to have an open hand to the poor, the widow, and the orphan. The mature don't have to be begged to support the church with their attendance, abilities, time and money. They are not interested in making doubtful changes which may lead to places they know not where. They find great satisfaction in seeing how closely they can follow the commandments of the Lord. They see nothing praiseworthy in making fun of the Scriptures nor seeing how far away they can get from them and still be permitted to walk among the saved.

The mature Christian has what every soul deeply longs for. Some may not know where to find it and many may be unwilling to pay the price required to obtain it, but the reward is simply "out of this world" (John 14:1-4).

Burl Curtis is a former editor of ***Carolina Christian****. He can be contacted at 118 Red Oak Lane, Searcy, AR 72143.*

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Let Each One Take Heed How He Builds:

I Corinthians 3:10

Wellington Smith, Jr

On his second missionary journey Paul established the church in Corinth (Acts 18). Of that earlier work he says, "I laid the foundation." Other preachers followed him, and itwas because of their folly that Paul issued the warning to "let each one take heed how he builds..." They did not build wisely upon the foundation laid by Paul and as a result the church in Corinth was divided, sinful, and possessed a bad reputation.

The reason this warning in I Corinthians 3:10 was necessary was that the Corinthians had developed sectarian and divisive loyalties for preachers. Paul wrote, "For it is has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ' " (I Corinthians 1:11-12). Then later he again referred to this divisive attitude, "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (I Corinthians 3:4). And still again, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (I Corinthians 4:6). Thus, Paul was led to the conclusion "for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (I Corinthians 3:3).

We preachers, because of our prominent positions, can be instruments of much harm or of great good. As a preacher leads sinners to conversion and teaches and instructs believers, he is building. Much prayer, time, and thought should be given to *how* to do this. The present and future security of the temple of God (the church) greatly depends upon how preachers build. "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (I Corinthians 3:17).

Doctrinally weak preaching produces doctrinally weak believers, and the same may certainly be said of moral issues — Corinth being a case in point. Indeed, most people are what they are because of what they have been taught. To insure the soundness of the church doctrinally and the purity of the church morally, "let each take heed how he builds."

HOW SHOULD I BUILD?

Realizing the tremendous responsibilities that rest upon me as a preacher, certainly I should want to consider how to build and how not to build. Once we understand how not to build, we immediately are led to understand how we are to build.

First, "we preach not ourselves" (2 Corinthians 4:5). The welfare of the church rests on a weak and unstable foundation if people are converted by the pleasing personality of a persuasive preacher instead of by the gospel of Christ. A preacher should use his natural and acquired abilities, but should also guard against the temptation to build a work around himself and his personal desires. The only stable and secure foundation for preaching and building is the gospel of Christ. As Paul said in I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And to conclude the quote from 2 Corinthians 4:5, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake." This was the basis for all early Christian preaching and building. For instance, when Philip encountered the eunuch from Ethiopia, "he opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35).

> "A preacher should use his natural and acquired abilities, but should also guard against the temptation to build a work around himself and his personal desires."

Thus, preachers *are not* to build with excellency of speech, the wisdom of men, or with enticing words. Listen to how Paul describes described his approach to the Corinthians, "And I brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

A further implication of this is that preachers *are not* to build by preaching and exalting their opinions. Much trouble has been caused and many congregations divided by this kind of preaching. Many preachers are so inflated with themselves and their opinions that when they are stuck with the pin of criticism they blow up and oftentimes the congregation along with them. At this point we are reminded of the words of the apostle Peter, who counseled "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (I Peter 4:11). And even more pointedly, Paul wrote to the Galatians, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you that what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

And preachers *are not* to build by weakening the demands of Christianity.

Such preaching only opens the floodgates for sin and immaturity. We are sometimes tempted to do this because there are some people who do not love God enough to stop sinning. The impression is left that one can have a casual attitude toward sin and still be alright. Paul recognized this temptation and offered this advice to his young preacher friend Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside unto fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:1-5). And to the Corinthians themselves, who had indeed taken a casual attitude toward sin, he said, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person…Therefore, 'put away from yourselves the evil person' " (1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

And further, preachers *are not* to build by primarily negative preaching. The negative, when necessary, is a means to a positive end. Some of us, as it has been said, "seem to have been born in the objective case and the kickative mood." This kind of preaching creates religious fanatics and leads others to despair. The gospel is good news!

Preaching brothers, let us do our best to "fulfill the ministry." Let us build upon the stable foundation of Jesus Christ and Him alone.

Wellington Smith, Jr. serves the Walkup Ave. church in Monroe, NC. Contact him at 2501 Walkup Ave., Monroe, NC 28110.

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

BLACK MOUNTAIN, NC…

A new congregation has been recently established Black Mountain. The Blue Ridge Church of Christ is currently meeting at the Black Mountain Public Library. Worship times on Sunday are Bible School at 9:30a.m., worship at 10:30 a.m., and evening worship at 5:30 p.m. The Wednesday Bible study is at 7:00 p.m. The preacher is Jim Hunter and you may call (704) 665-2705.

STATESVILLE, NC…

The Northview church will host its sixth annual youth rally August 1-3. The theme is "Jesus and Me." For more information you can call the church office at (704)

RALEIGH, NC…

The Rochester Heights church will celebrate its third annual Homecoming October 31-November 2. The theme is "Fix Your Thoughts on Jesus" and the keynote speaker will be Andrew Harriston of Atlanta, GA. There will also be acommunity forum on the justice system as well as choral groups and a program for the youth.

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Everyone Has Their Say— No One Always Has Their Way. . .

PAUL JARRETT

The Madison Church of Christ in Madison, TN, is the largest congregation among churches of Christ with a Sunday attendance of over 3,000. In his book *The Madison Story* (Gospel Advocate, 1987), George Goldtrap attributed the size of the Madison church in part to the fact that they had never experienced a church split. He attributed their unity to the fact that "everyone has his say, but no one has his way, all the time."

It seems to me that brother Goldtrap's statement expresses in a concise manner two essentials for maintaining unity. These two essentials are communication and compromise (and by compromise I *do not* mean the compromise of essential biblical truths). Whether it be in the church, the home, or any other area in which people are asked to work together, communication and compromise must be practiced if unity of purpose and work are to be maintained.

> "Troubles are multiplied when it seems that a select few always have their way to the exclusion of the others."

Seeds of dissatisfaction and discord are sown when people feel that their right to express themselves has been denied. Troubles are multiplied when it seems that a select few always have their way to the exclusion of the others. Whether true or not, once it is perceived that such a situation does exist, problems inevitably follow.

Therefore, if we are to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we must take heed to the counsel of the apostle Paul when he wrote, *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Philippians 2:3-4).

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

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Jesus' Temptations and Ours

TERRY GRAVES

Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." Every Christian is tempted. Sometimes those temptations come sweeping over us like wave after wave, threatening to overwhelm us. It helps to remember that even Jesus our Lord was tempted. Though fully God, He was also fully human. Just as they are for us, Jesus' temptations were a crucial part of His experience and life.

Luke writes, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry." It is significant that before beginning His public ministry, Jesus faced off with Satan after being led by the Holy Spirit into the desert. What occurred there took place under God's direction as the Spirit sent Jesus forth to do battle with the Evil One. As we seek out those lessons that are instructive for our own experience, let's look at the two characters involved in this unfolding drama.

First, there is Jesus, the tempted one. Why did Jesus have to be tempted in the first place? Let me suggest three possible reasons.

One was to show to all the universe Christ's flawless character — His wholeness, His holiness, his perfection, His sinlessness. At this point we are reminded of Hebrews 4:15, which tells us that Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin." The sinlessness and purity of Jesus could not have been clearly displayed without being tested and proven.

Second, in His temptations the Lord identifies with us in our temptations. We can never say that He doesn't know what we're going through. Luke noted that after fasting for the forty days, Jesus "was hungry." This is more than an incidental notation. It suggests among other things that Jesus understands the human situation because He has experienced it.

And third, Jesus was tempted in order to defeat the Devil. As John put it, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (I John 3:8). In the midst of His earthly life, living in the nitty–gritty of the human condition, Jesus faced His enemy in hand–to–hand combat, and He won! In that victory Jesus has shown us how to successfully deal with our own temptations. One of the primary tools He used in resisting the temptations on this occasion was Scripture. Three times He responded to Satan's attempts to get Him to yield by saying, "It is written," and then quoting from the Old

> *"A vital and living connectedness with the word of God is a key element of success in dealing with temptation."*

Testament Scriptures. This is simply one of the many reasons we ourselves need to be well–versed in the Scriptures. We must immerse ourselves in them. In I John 2:14 the apostle wrote, "I write to you... because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." A vital and living connectedness with the word of God is a key element of success in dealing with temptation.

Another primary weapon in Jesus' dealing with temptation was prayer. Although the text in Luke does not specifically mention prayer, we do know that it was the practice of Jesus' life to pray when He was tested and under pressure. All the critical moments in His life were accompanied by prayer. It would be impossible to imagine that in the wilderness, after forty days of fasting and facing the one who possessed unspeakable powers of evil, Jesus did not pray. In Matthew 6:13 Jesus taught His disciples to pray for spiritual protection. Thus, prayer for us as well is a powerful ally in the struggle against Satan.

Now, let's think for a moment about the second character in this drama — the tempter. In Luke's account the devil is not presented merely as a symbol of evil. He is a real being. He is a sinister, rebellious, deceitful being who hates God. He also hates the child of God and he desperately wants to destroy us.

Three Areas of Temptation

The three temptations represented an assault in three basic areas that correspond to the three fundamental allurements of this world, "For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world" (I John 2:16).

The first temptation, turning the stones to bread, appealed to the lust of the flesh (or the "cravings of sinful man" NIV). This temptation questioned God's provision and care. Think how desperately hungry our Lord must have been. He would have been weak and vulnerable, but how did Jesus respond? He said that life is not defined by the satisfaction of physical longings and urges, but by doing God's will and trusting Him.

The second temptation, possession of the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship Satan, represented the lust of the eyes. Jesus was taken up to a high place and shown all the kingdoms of the world. Power, glory and wealth. Enticing stuff. Countless men have wreaked havoc on the earth for these very reasons. But surely Satan already knew that Jesus was going to be King. Probably so, and if in fact he did know that, then this temptation was the offering of a short–cut around self–denial, suffering and the cross. Ultimately it was an appeal to selfishness.

Jesus, however, chose instead to receive from the Father what alone was the Father's to give. He reminded Satan that only one Being is worthy of worship. The message for us is simple and clear: don't bow down to Satan and world.

The final temptation, for Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, represented the pride of life. With this temptation Satan seemed to be saying to Jesus, " Go ahead. Take things into your own hands. Put God to the test and let Him demonstrate your Sonship now." Jesus recognized this proposal as a presumptuous test of God's care. It would be testing God rather than trusting God. Instead, Jesus will be a humble servant who trusts the will of the Father. He goes only where the Father leads.

Finally, the devil departed from that place. Jesus had won that battle, emerging from the grueling experience unscathed. He resisted. He stood firm. He stood solidly with the Father.

Concluding Thoughts

After studying this passage I came away with these observations and lessons.

First, Satan and his demons do in fact tempt us. Satan is not for us merely the personification of evil. He works through our most basic and natural human needs and desires, seeking to take advantage of our fallen nature ("the flesh").

Second, the experience of temptation is not a denial of the genuineness of one's commitment to Christ. As has often been said, it is not a sin to be tempted; the sin is in yielding. The writer of Hebrews said that Christ was tempted in every way as we are, but without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Third, God uses temptations and trials to show us where we stand before Him. Temptations show us what we're made of in terms of the strength of our character. They are opportunities to express our loyalty to God. They prove and improve us, teaching us not to trust ourselves. They further teach us to seek God continually and depend on Him constantly.

Fourth, in dealing with temptation it is important that we learn to make use of the word of God in concert with prayer. Draw near to God through these avenues. Christ is with us and within us, and we are in Him. We are surrounded by God, enclosed in Him, included in His family.

When temptation does come, as Paul said to the Corinthians, it is possible to escape it successfully. We don't have to fail and Jesus by His own experience has shown us the way out.

Terry Graves preaches for the Shelby Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 845 W. Warren St., Shelby, NC 28150.

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Who Can Endure the Wrath of God?

PETER RODE

The books of Jonah and Nahum are related, not in time nor message, but in the fact that they are both addressed to the same recipients — the city of Nineveh, capital of Assyria. Thus, they should be read in conjunction with one another. The overarching theme of these two books is a lesson we need to learn, and need to learn well. It's a lesson that we need to tell the rest of the world. It's the lesson that God is patient, but there are limits to His patience.

> **"GOD IS PATIENT AND HE IS WILLING TO GIVE PEOPLE A NUMBER OF CHANCES, BUT AT SOME TIME OR ANOTHER — WE DON'T KNOW HIS TIMETABLE — HE WILL DRAW THE LINE IN THE SAND AND CRY, 'ENOUGH!'**

When the reluctant Jonah prophesied to the city, the king and all his subjects heeded the word of God and repented by wearing sackcloth and ashes in turning from their evil ways. The result was that God spared them from the impending doom Jonah had come to preach, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jonah 3:4). However, some years later when the prophet Nahum preaches to them, no option is given. There are no more chances; no more opportunities provided for repentance. God's patience had run out! His message was, "Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal" (Nahum 3:19).

God is patient and He is willing to give people a number of chances, but at some time oranother—we don't know His timetable—He will draw the line in the sand and cry, "Enough!" When that happens, whether it be a nation or an individual, God will act against those who have rejected Him, and He will act decisively. That same message was given by Peter when he said, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise… He is patient with you… But the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:8-10).

God had been gracious and patient with Nineveh. He had sent Jonah and they had listened. However, it seems that during the course of time they had reverted to their old ways again, and the Lord was not pleased. The same message rings throughout the prophets as they try to persuade Israel and Judah to conform to His ways. Finally they, too, are punished for their waywardness and are destroyed.

However, there is always hope where God is concerned. He is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), and is always holding out His arms in anticipation of a change of heart. When this takes place, God is always willing to accept the wayward. "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust Him…" (Nahum 1:7).

My hope and prayer is that you and I don't wear out the patience of God, but rather, that we will be found in Him at all times.

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. church that is located at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410. You can contact him at that address.

On Being Filled With Gratitude

Mikal Frazier

My life had been given back to me. We glided safely to the runway and as soon as we shakily crawled out of the single engine Cessna, I stooped down and touched the ground. At that moment gratitude filled my heart so fully that nothing could have stolen my joy! For a period of time all I could do was tell my pleasure. I said over and over, "This is wonderful. This is wonderful!" Only minutes before we have been 6,500 feet above the ground in the dark of the night and had lost our only engine. When I first heard the terrible racket break loose from the engine and the plane begin a fierce shudder from one end to the other, I believed with all my heart that my fate was sealed (at least as far as this world was concerned). A combination of pre–dawn darkness and the thick blanket of tall, willowy pines covering the East Texas left me with no hope of a safe landing, but through God's care we did land safely. I would be able to return to my husband and young children. My joy was inexpressible.

This, however, was not the first time I remember being overwhelmed with the emotion of gratitude. The first time was when my children were very young. Their preciousness to me was growing daily. I felt as though I would absolutely burst with joy and that it just had to be expressed. It was then that as I demonstrated my love for them in one way or another, I would also have to verbalize "Thank you, God." I could not contain my joy.

Then, when our first grandchild was born, I remember holding him in my arms on the very first day of his life and saying to his other grandmother, "I know this happens every day, but this is just marvelous." I was overflowing with a desire to express my wonder.

There is a wonder and joy even beyond these experiences that fills us with an inexpressible gratitude for a loving Father and Savior when we truly understand how great a salvation we have. When filled with this gratitude we are aware that we have a debt, on obligation. As Paul put it,

> "When I am aware of this gift of grace and there is produced within me such wonder, awe, worship and a sense of blessing and dependency, how can I respond in any way other than grateful obedience?"

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors..." (Romans 8:12). The words of Paul from Ephesians 2, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, will lead to the kind of passion I am talking about if those words are really taken to heart:

"It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, to tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin–dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in the highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah."

Charles Hodge, in his little book *Amazing Grace*, does a wonderful job of capturing the wonder, awe and worship with which lost mortals should respond to a loving Savior. Hodge says of the gratitude produced by His grace that it is "humbled dependence." And two consequences of this gratitude, as described by Hodge, are "a sense of blessing and a sense of absolute dependency." When I am aware of this gift of grace and there is produced within me such wonder, awe, worship and a sense of blessing and dependency, how can I respond in any other way than grateful obedience?

Gratitude energizes. Have you ever had anyone perform some great favor for you so that afterwards you were eager to act in a way that said, "I am indebted to you"? You were energized by your gratitude. As Christian women that is what God wants from us. Our wonder, awe, worship and gratitude compel us to Lordship faith in Jesus Christ.

Gratitude to our Savior is motivation to behave in Christ–like ways to our husbands and families. When our response grows out of gratitude, being what Jesus would have us to be will not be a burden. When we are making choices in our relationships because of gratitude, there is never any regret. That gratitude instills in us a sense of servanthood that is expressed in our relationships to our husbands and families; a sense of servanthood that is in reality a celebration of the joy of His grace.

Ladies, we have the choice of submitting to Christ's Lordship out of gratitude, or continuing to live in fear and chaos as we chase the idols of the day. Any choice other than submission to His will leads to disappointment and emptiness. Following Him in Lordship faith results in being filled with His Spirit and being "transformed into His likeness with ever–increasing joy."

Mikal Frazier is a wife, mother, and grandmother and is also a licensed family therapist with a private practice in Minden and Bossier City, Lousiana. This article is reprinted with permission from the ***All About Families*** *online newsletter. The newsletter is free to internet subscribers. To subscribe by e-mail send your request to mcoc@mindchurch.org with the subject line "Subscribe Family."*

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Editorial:

The Glorious Servant

John 13:1-7

Dennis Conner

It had been a long and remarkable journey that Jesus and His disciples had been making together. They had seen His glory revealed time and time again as the compassionate healer, the brilliant teacher, and even the Lord over death. Now, their journey brought them to a rented upper chamber where, unknown to the disciples, the meal they were about to take together would be their last with the Master. It would prove to be a meal that would in time change their whole perception of Christ and their understanding of what it means to be His follower. In that room they would witness yet another manifestation of Christ's glory — as a servant.

They had been staying in Bethany, about six miles away, but on the evening of the events captured in John 13 they were in Jerusalem. Their sandaled feet were dirty and tired as they reclined around the table. When they arrived at the room where they would observe the Passover meal together, a pitcher of water, a basin and a towel had been prepared as part of the typical setting of the rented chamber. However, as they all sat around the table, not one of the disciples made a move to carry out the custom. Why? Perhaps Luke 22:24 provides a clue, "But there was also a rivalry among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest." They were apparently too preoccupied with the concerns of their own egos. Perhaps it was pride that kept them glued to their seats.

How could Jesus on this destined night redirect their attention and quench their prideful passions? John says He "rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself." As the Lord moved from one set of feet to another, from one disciple to another, each separate action must have elicited a response of astonishment mingled with shame. As the group witnessed Jesus on His knees, shuffling from one disciple to another, they truly beheld His glory "full of grace and truth." Indeed, perhaps no single act of Jesus, short of the cross itself, revealed His glory as powerfully and magnificently as did the washing of the feet of His own disciples.

Jesus demonstrated that night a *glorious love*. According to John 13:1, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." How often they had frustrated Him with their unbelief, their dimness of mind, their shallow understanding, and their fickleness. But He loved them. Walking along the road earlier that day He had listened to their childish bickering as to who would occupy what place in the kingdom when it came. But He loved them. And now at supper with them for what Jesus knew would be the last time before the cross, He sat and witnessed their stubbornness and immaturity once again. But He loved them still.

It was love that prompted Jesus to get up from the table that evening, just as it was love that would drive Him to be lifted up on the cross for them. It was because of love that Christ looked beyond His own troubled spirit and did for His disciples what needed to be done. Jesus should have been the one to whom consideration was shown that night, but it was He who now found Himself on bended knee. Why? Because He loved them. He always had loved them, and that night He loved them still.

Is this picture of the disciples disturbingly familiar? To be sure, we can too easily see ourselves in them, can't we? Preoccupied with our own egos, filled with pride, so often childish and stubborn. Yet, what was said of Christ's feelings for them can also be said of us, "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

Jesus' actions that night also revealed a *glorious humility.* Verse 3 says, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God..." The twelve had been arguing about who would be the greatest. Jesus knew the answer to that question. *He was!* That night He was fully conscious of His dignity as the One into whose hands the Father had placed all things. He knew what it was like to dwell in heaven and receive the constant praise, adoration and worship of the heavenly hosts. It was in the full consciousness of His heavenly origin that Jesus got up from the table that night. Someone in the course of my readings has observed that for one mere man to pour water over the feet of another flawed, imperfect human being was no great condescension; but that He who was "with God and was God" should do so is of unparalleled significance. This was partly what lay at the root of Peter's reaction when Jesus came round to him (vv. 6-9). Peter understood that as the Master, such behavior was beneath Jesus' dignity. And in a sense it was. Jesus should not have had to wash their feet, just as He should not have had to die on the cross. But it was in the full awareness of who He was that Jesus took to the towel, just as it was in the full awareness of who He was that Jesus took to the cross.

No, it was not fitting that Jesus should have been the one to wash dirty feet that night, but He was not concerned with what was fitting. Rather, Jesus was concerned with what was needed. The word for that is humility.

And then, we see in the washing of the disciples' feet *the glory of His grace.* Do you remember who else was sitting at the table that night? Judas. One by one Jesus made His way around the table. Matthew, John, Peter...and Judas, the betrayer. Judas, the hypocrite. All Jesus had ever done to Judas was to love him as He loved the rest.

Have you ever had the experience of having someone slander you, or lie about you, or stab you in the back? Sure you have. But did you then afterwards have the opportunity to do something good for that person? What thoughts ran through your mind? What feelings were in your heart? And what did you do? What would Jesus do as He approached Judas? The same as He had done for the others. There is a word for what Jesus did. *Grace.*

Judas did not deserve to have the Son of God before him, on His knees, taking dirty, sin defiled feet into His holy hands. But then, neither did you and I deserve Jesus on the cross, taking onto His holy body all our dirty sins. What a remarkable moment of grace that was that night, but it was only a prelude to an even more remarkable moment of grace that would soon take Jesus to the grave.

We should not overlook the fact that the footwashing incident ended with a call, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15). Jesus was not calling the disciples to establish another ritual. He was calling them to establish a new order — the order of the towel. He was calling them to a life of servanthood. A life that would reflect His glory as the One sent from God to serve lost humanity; to serve us.

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Associate Editorial:

God Doesn't Like Small Churches

JIM MULLICAN

Before someone jumps all over me, let me clarify that statement. God wants the church to grow and fill the earth, as well as each local community. In Daniel 2:35, the prophet portrays the rock representing the church as growing into "a huge mountain" that "filled the whole earth." Likewise, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands us to "make disciples of all the nations," and in Mark 16:15 He further says we are to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

I have spent the past twenty–five years working with small churches, and I have loved each one. However, in all cases our goal was to bring more and more people into the kingdom, resulting in growth. Just like with individuals, churches must of necessity start out small; but also like individuals, growth is God's purpose for churches.

Sometimes over the years I have known churches that were content to stay small and individuals content with keeping them small. However, that attitude is diametrically opposed to the will of God, and anyone who harbors it and opposes growth will be held accountable on the day of judgment. Let us grow and be in accord with the will of God.

Brother Mullican has just completed 12 years with the Central Haywood church. He serves the church as both its preacher and one of its elders.

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New Feature to Begin

With the September issue we will begin a new column devoted to our youth. Danny Boggs, associate minister for the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville, NC, has graciously consented to serve as the editor for this new feature column. In addition to his responsibilities at Hendersonville, Danny is also involved with Palmetto Bible Camp and has gained the respect of the young people whose lives he has touched. We are happy to have him as a part of our team.

The column will be directed specifically to youth; in fact, many of the articles will be written by teens themselves. It is our hope that this new column will help to fill a genuine need in our churches and families, and we ask that you encourage your young people to tune in!

Guest Editorial:

Ecclesiastes

Don Utley

I was trying to recall the details. My secretary remembered the name of the movie — City Slickers. I was able to remember the actors — Billy Crystal and Jack Pallance — but was unable to recall the name of Jack Pallance's character. She phoned her husband who she assured me would remember. He did. The name was Curly. I was impressed.

I had trouble with the details, but the mental picture was still fresh. Perhaps you too are able to visualize Curly's bony finger being held in Billy Crystal's face as Jack Pallance philosophizes, "There is only one thing that is really important, and you have to figure out what it is." I recall how quickly it became the illustration-de-jour in sermons across the country. Ever fearing using a cliche, I placed it in my mental sermon illustration file to be pulled out years later — perhaps on some distant panicky Saturday night.

But as I asked the authors of this issue to wrestle with the words and thoughts of "the Preacher" of Ecclesiastes, Curly repeatedly returned to my mind. His particular assertion informed an entire movie. (It even spawned a sequel; theatre–goers could not wait to discover Curly's "one thing!") The author of Ecclesiastes makes an even more powerful and singular assertion: to "fear God and keep His commandments" summarizes the "whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)." Everything else is peripheral, even "meaningless" (12:8). That is the unique focus of Ecclesiastes.

I don't mean to imply, however, that there is only one point to hear from this wonderful book. The authors featured in this issue have attempted to honor the singular theme of Ecclesiastes, but they have listened on our behalf for other important lessons. I trust you will agree that their efforts have proven to be delightfully insightful.

Don Utley is the pulpit minister of the North Raleigh Church of Christ; 8701 Falls of Neuse; Raleigh, NC 27613.

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Joe Cannon, Director, Highland St. Church of Christ
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The Message of Ecclesiastes

Amos Allen

"I am tired. My work hasn't amounted to a hill of beans. I have tried my best but it has not made the slightest bit of difference. There is no light at the end of the tunnel and there is no silver lining within the dark clouds. I have had all the character-building experiences I can stand. And who really cares, anyway?

Don't tell me things will get better. How do you know? Don't tell me to hang in there. My patience or impatience counts for nothing. Let's be honest: you and I are going to die and we will not have changed anything by having lived. Deal with it.

In case you disagree with me, listen to this: 'Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!' (Ecclesiastes 1:2) Now what do you have to say?"

What is it about?

Is it okay to say such less–than–wonderful words? Is that the message of Ecclesiastes, that nothing matters and life is simply to be endured? I was not having a great day when I read through the book recently, and passages like 2:17 did not help: "So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

How are we to listen to cynicism of this magnitude? Since Christians do not believe life is meaningless, should we ignore this material? (That was my first inclination.)

The bold pessimism of Ecclesiastes got my attention and made me uncomfortable. My uneasiness is probably due to a reluctance to consider the unpleasant realities of life. I honestly want my religious system to produce health and wealth all the time. I was never taught to sing, "I've got some grief, grief, grief, grief down in my heart...."

In a recent conversation, I was told that our physical well–being is a priority with God. Isaiah 53:5 was quoted ("by his wounds we are healed") as evidence that God wants us to be healthy. The interpretation may have some problems, but I want it to be true. I do not want to face the hard realities of sickness, death, loss and injustice. The author of Ecclesiastes challenges us to do it anyway.

Background

The name "Ecclesiastes" (Koheleth in Hebrew) means "one who calls an assembly." The author refers to himself as "Teacher" or "Preacher": "The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). Commentators suggest that the references to Solomon (1:12,16; 2:4-9) are a signal to the readers, telling them what the subject matter is, namely, wisdom.

Purpose

Why was Ecclesiastes written? In Deuteronomy, we see that doing right will bring blessings and doing wrong, curses. Proverbs teaches us about two ways of living: wise living, in which things will go well, and foolish living, in which we can expect the worst. These principles are true, but they are not there so we can figure out who God is. (Read Job!) God is not predictable.

The Teacher of Ecclesiastes is reacting to a philosophy that reduces God to a formula. Many of us want to understand God and the purpose of life, but our knowledge cannot tame God or control what happens. The Teacher says that God is not manageable or easily understood, and life may not be as tidy as some suggest:

> *"Consider what God has done:*
> *Who can straighten*
> *what He has made crooked?*
> *When times are good, be happy;*
> *but when times are bad, consider:*
> *God has made the one*
> *as well as the other.*
> *Therefore, a man cannot discover*
> *anything about his future."* (7:13,14)

The author tells what he has observed throughout his life, and compares it to what he has heard being taught. He has seen the righteous lose and the wicked win. He has watched a prince walk while the slave rides. He has noticed a rich man worry his life away out of fear of what might happen. He then sets out his observations—a strong, full-strength dose of reality that intends to get attention.

How to read

With this in mind, when we read an unequivocal claim ("Everything is meaningless"), we should see it as an effort to make people stop and think. When we discover apparent contradictions in the book (Is wisdom worthless, or not?), we should remember that he observed many different situations that required different responses. When we read ideas that disagree with the New Testament (3:20,21) we must remember that the Teacher did not know Jesus. His response was to his people in his time.

Theme

One theme runs through the whole book: "Everything is meaningless!" Efforts to dissect, categorize and gain control over life have given some people a certain arrogance. Their insights make them wise in their own eyes. The Teacher dismisses them out of hand: "No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it" (8:17). And if we should disagree, the Teacher has a trump card up his sleeve: death. Will our possessions or pleasures make any difference when we die? Can our wisdom or power keep death away? All our work and worry will not change the inevitable.

As Christians, we react negatively to this theme. We believe that by following Jesus (loving, serving, dying to self, etc.), we *do* make a difference in the world. But there are elements of Jesus' teaching that harmonize with the Teacher. For example, God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). I do not see that Ecclesiastes has much of an argument with Christianity.

Closely tied to the theme is an idea within the book that argues against predictability. There is a time for everything, but we have no control over that timing (3:1-15). Chance rules, rather than strength or wisdom (9:11). God gives and takes seemingly without rhyme or reason.

Observations

To all who would argue with the "king over Israel in Jerusalem," he offers some observations:

1. Nature monotonously repeats its movements, never accomplishing a thing. The sun works all day only to hurry back and start over again. Rivers pour into the sea, yet never fill it. "But," someone objects, "with people it is different." Really? One generation follows another, and work done today will be repeated tomorrow. There is no change, and nothing significant is accomplished. (1:1-11)

2. Everything is a waste of time and energy. The wise and the foolish both will die. The same holds true for the poor and the rich. And even if we accomplish great things, the one who inherits them may be a fool. (1:12-2:26)

3. There is a time for everything, but men are unable to understand it. (3:1-15)

4. Injustice and oppression exist. Man's system of justice has not eliminated evil on earth. (3.16-4.3)

5. To have wealth but no friends is misery. All people need the help of others. (4:7-12)

6. God is not one with whom to trifle. Our words to Him should be few and carefully considered; He does not suffer fools gladly. (5:1-7)

7. Having a lot of wealth is not the purpose of life. It can lead to greed and worry, and we have no guarantee that it will not be lost or destroyed. (5:10-6.9)

8. Moderation is the best course in areas of morality. The overly righteous are hypocritical, and the overly wicked will give others reason to do them harm. (7:15-22)

9. Neither the righteous nor the wicked always get what they deserve. There are no pat answers or predictable outcomes. (8:12-15)

10. Death is the destiny of every man; still, in the meantime, life is better than death. (9:1-10)

11. Youth is wonderful, but the young will grow old. As we enjoy the days of youth, we must no forget what lies ahead. (11:7-12:7)

When read as the observations of a knowledgeable man, the book appears less pessimistic or cynical. What he has observed is true; we have all seen many of the same things. And when read as a balance to the overly positive spin put on life by others, Ecclesiastes stands as a testimony to the unknowable and uncontrollable nature of God.

Advice

Ecclesiastes is full of advice about what to do and what not to do, but one three-part suggestion stands out: man should eat, drink, and enjoy his work (2:24; 3:12,13; 3:22; 5:18,19; 8:15; 9:7-9). The Teacher looks at several disheartening situations and concludes that eating, drinking, and enjoying life are better than death, better than worry–producing work, better than trying to control the seasons, better than unused wealth, and better than the inequities of life. He repeatedly states that food, drink, and enjoyment are gifts from God. Eating and drinking are simple, natural pleasures that should not be ignored.

Is there a major contradiction here — work is worthless, but enjoy it anyway? I think not. Perhaps the point is this: Work as a means to wealth or status is meaningless; work as a gift from God can be a source of great satisfaction.

My attempt here is not to defend or gloss over the teachings with which we disagree, but to see if there is more than what a first glance reveals.

Close

I do get tired. And discouraged, frustrated, disoriented — at times, I even border on despair. My observations tell me that life is not fair and is often downright terrible. I realize that a lot of what we do and plan and worry about is a "chasing after the wind." We devote our energy and time to getting something or doing something, only to find that it does not satisfy.

We church people struggle with our desires and with our fear that what we do will not make a difference. And we have an added burden: being righteous is quite demanding. We try to learn how to act when and with whom. We try to figure out the proper responses to life; we devote ourselves to coming up with the answers.

But do we realize that God is God? He controls what happens. He gives and takes. He *does* have the whole world in His hands. Maybe we should learn to live with the fact that He is an unpredictable God. "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him" (Psalm 115:3). We need to hear this message from time to time.

Ecclesiastes is not a book that gives us warm fuzzies when we read it. It is, however, a holy book with a Godly message about life.

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Reading Our Limitations:
The Perplexing Form and Message of Ecclesiastes

Meg Watson

As a graduate student in English, part of my job consists of teaching college freshmen how to become critical, discriminating readers and clear, effective writers. If I had received the text of Ecclesiastes from one of my students as his/her attempt at clear, effective writing, I probably would have flunked it. The margins would have been full of comments like "I'm confused here" or "I don't get it," and the paper would have been returned to the student with a request for a re–write. In other words, strictly from an English teacher's point of view, I find Ecclesiastes most reader–*un*friendly: it is fraught with seeming contradictions and inconsistencies; much of the material does not appear to be logically connected; and what little narrative structure or continuity *is* easily discernible seems too often interrupted with unexpected shifts in tone and turns in style.

Of course, the fact is the Ecclesiastes is *not* a freshman composition essay; it is a portion of holy Scripture. As such, I cannot dismiss its difficulty and complexity as simply the author's inexperience or ineffectiveness as a writer. I know that divine inspiration rendered to us the text as it stands for a reason; indeed, it may just be that the author of Ecclesiastes (identified in 1:1 as "the Preacher") *wanted* us to grapple with his book's lack of readability. Through the superficial lack of clarity and the seeminginaccessibility of his textual style, he perhaps was reflecting in a concrete form one of the most important thematic and theological messages of the book—namely, the limitations of human wisdom in relation to the ultimate mysteriousness of the nature and workings of God.

The parallel between form and content may not be as far–fetched as it might first appear. If careful readers (and particularly English teachers!) are sticklers for order and structure in a written text, we all are sticklers for principles of order and structure in our lives. We look for consistent cause–and–effect connections between our actions and their outcomes just as readers look for steady, logical connections between the paragraphs of a novel or a newspaper article. Yet just as readers' expectations can be thwarted by the haphazard placement of thoughts and ideas, our individual searches for consistency can be frustrated by the seeming randomness of the world about us.

The Preacher addresses this randomness at several points throughout his narrative, and many such passages are quite striking in their frankness and honesty: "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all" (9:11). If there is any one passage of scripture that we can understand, it is probably this one! We know that it is often the unscrupulous colleague who wins the promotion; we realize that it is frequently the hardest–working parent who still remains unable to provide adequately for his/her family; we see that it is sometimes the most vibrant, life–embracing loved one who is struck with a crippling terminal illness. Thus, despite all our hopes to find a readily apparent, logically formulated design behind life on this earth, the overwhelming evidence of our day–to–day living suggests that our world is, in fact, a most illogical, disorderly place.

For most of us, that is not an easy pill to swallow, and when we see that there is no immediate solution to the dilemma, we, like the Preacher, set about applying our faculties of human intellect to make sense of the contradictions we live out. We even do so with a certain amount of confidence in our intellectual abilities—after all, if we are capable of handling the complexities of a James Joyce novel, shouldn't we be able to untangle the knotty issues that inform our very own lives? Indeed, much of Ecclesiastes affirms the value of human wisdom, extolling it as a virtue that empowers us to

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live reputably and meaningfully: "Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king" (4:13); "Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city" (7:19); "A man's wisdom makes his face shine" (8:1); "Wisdom is better than weapons of war" (9:18); "A wise man's heart inclines him toward the right" (10:2). That is just what a graduate student wants to hear—it reassures her that the late nights and gallons of coffee are worthwhile after all! And it's just what humanity in general wants to hear—it reaffirms our faith in the progress that can be achieved through an earnest and diligent search for knowledge.

Yet we know from experience that even the most strenuous efforts at attaining wisdom will not yield all of the logical answers and explanations for which we yearn. Recognizing this indisputable fact, the Preacher stresses the limitations and failures of human wisdom as well: "For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (1:18); "For of the wise man as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise man dies just like the fool!" (2:16); "For what advantage has the wise man over the fool?" (6:8). That is *not* so much what a graduate student wants to hear—while she is quite ready to agree that "much study is a weariness of the flesh" (12:12), she is rather pained to concede that her endeavors to "know wisdom" are "but a striving after wind" (1:17). And it's not so much what *any* of us wants to hear—no one wants to believe that his/her investment in formal training or years of experience are nothing more than "vanity."

If, then, our own wisdom fails, what other recourse do we have in our search to understand the exact nature of God's creation and His workings in it? The answer, as powerfully stated in Ecclesiastes, is "none whatsoever." The truth of the matter is that all of the mysteries that surround our heavenly Father and His universe cannot and will not be uncovered by humans, foolish *or* wise, on this earth. Indeed, the Preacher himself (significantly, someone renowned as a wise man [12:9]), acknowledges the ultimate failure of human attempts to know fully the nature and workings of God:

When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep; then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. (8:16–17)

The Preacher seems to be making a distinction between the aims we may have in our strivings for knowledge. If we cultivate wisdom in order to enhance our reverence for the vastness of God's power and the richness of His creation, to increase our capacities to interact meaningfully and compassionately with others, and to enhance our understandings of our own selves, we will find such cultivation rewarding and uplifting. If, however, our intention in seeking wisdom is to pin down every unfathomable aspect of our mysterious God or to explain away all of the paradoxical elements of His plan for human life on earth and in the hereafter, we will see our efforts thoroughly defeated.

Of course, all of that is easy to handle in theory; *naturally* we don't strive to know as much as God! Yet how often do we fill the margins of our lives with a frustrated "I don't get it" or a desperate "I'm confused here?" How often do we find ourselves deploring our own ignorance rather than celebrating God's fantastic mysteries? The first step toward remedying this tendency may be the recognition that there exists a difference between the ignorance of things we *do not* know and the ignorance of things we *can not* know. The former should inspire in us a curiosity to learn and a desire to grow, while the latter should place us in a humble state of worship and awe. (Interestingly enough, in Roget's college thesaurus, the entry for the verb "to confuse" concludes with a cross–reference that reads "See *humility*.") An essential element of wisdom, then, may be the ability to distinguish between these two varieties of ignorance; that is, once we develop "a respect for the limits of human intelligence and a sense of reverence for the vast dark reaches of reality where reason cannot penetrate," we not only free ourselves from the unhealthy and unscriptural burden of finding all the answers, we also allow ourselves to make the most of the powers of intellect which have been given to us by God (Harold Kushner, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*).

Thus, rather than wallowing in the dissatisfaction of our own intellectual limitations, we can take comfort in and give glory to the Creator and Master who knows more than we.

So maybe I judged my student's hypothetical "essay" a bit too quickly. Ecclesiastes may be an artistic success precisely because it is so tangled, complex, and contradictory. Commentator T. A. Perry has even invited readers to consider Ecclesiastes' contradictions "as opportunities rather than embarrassments; to view them as motivated, indeed, as forming the literary basis of the entire book" (T. A. Perry, *Dialogues With Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes*).

To that I would add only the suggestion that the contradictions contribute to the theological basis of the book as well. The textual wrinkles that make Ecclesiastes so difficult to "iron out" may serve to remind us that life on this earth is a paradoxical, inconsistent, and perplexing business that will frequently escape our powers of intellectual explanation. Yet, as the Preacher reminds us with his summary words, "Fear God and keep his commandments" (12:13), there exists an omniscient and omnipotent Father above, whose wisdom and powers immeasurably exceed our own. Awestruck by His vastness and humbled by our limitations, we should consider it our highest duty and our supreme privilege to worship and serve Him.

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For Everything There Is A Season

Michael Claxton

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

My first real introduction to Ecclesiastes came when I was in eighth grade. As a budding class clown, I received almost daily reprimands from teachers who were tired of my comedy routines and disruptive antics. Since middle-school boys have notoriously bad hearing and even worse memory, the teachers' stern words would quickly fade out of mind as soon as some new clever remark occurred to me. Hungry for attention and proud of what I thought was a constant stream of hilarious comments, I was rarely phased by any negative reaction from the powers on high.

Yet on my first-quarter report card in eighth grade, a teacher finally got my attention with some Bible-based advice: "For everything there is a season...even for jokes," she wrote. Having been part of a church-going family all my life, I knew that my teacher was quoting the Old Testament, and I was more than a little frightened to think that my classroom behavior was bad enough to merit a warning from the Good Book. Children are not used to hearing Bible messages in school, so this brief quotation made quite an impression on a certain 13-year-old comic. It also made an impression on my mother, who was so displeased with my conduct grade that she arranged a conference with the teacher. While that was bad enough, I was especially disconcerted to learn that the conference was to be between only me and the teacher; my mother did not plan to attend herself. She wisely believed that responsibility for solving our own problems was an important lesson for us to learn.

And so, without a parental buffer zone, I nervously appeared in the teacher's office for my appointed time of destruction. Actually, the meeting did not at all result in my being executed, but instead turned out to be a pleasant time wherein the teacher kindly suggested ways for containing my hilarity. She explained that humor was not forbidden in her class, but simply needed to be limited, and she helped to teach me one of the great principles of comedy and life: timing. The conference became — in the spirit of Ecclesiastes — a lesson in when to speak and when to be silent, a concept that is especially difficult for children (and for not a few adults). Yet it is a concept which we must learn, for how many relationships have been damaged and how many opportunities have been lost because we do not know when — and when not — to speak.

Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon teaches us that part of wisdom is knowing *when.* For a child like me, wisdom meant knowing when to be funny and when to be serious, when to speak and when to listen to someone else. Such lessons are introduced tous as children, but we spend the rest of our lives perfecting them. Only by listening to the speech of mature Christians, studying God's Word, and disciplining our tongues will we learn when to be silent and when to speak.

While there is much to say about the times when Christians should keep silent, I want to focus for the rest of this article on the times when Christians should speak. Timidity can be just as great a sin as garrulousness, since no one can hear the gospel message from a pair of closed lips. There are many situations when our failure to speak is a moral and spiritual failure. It is not a time to be silent when we should be praising God. It is not a time to be silent when we see a brother or sister hurting, or even falling away. It is not a time to be silent when we owe an apology or when someone needs our forgiveness.

Yet few of us are gifted with eloquence, and often a Christian's silence is a result more of not having the words than not having the desire to comfort or encourage. I once clumsily said "I understand" to a man whose wife had died in a car accident. He bluntly told me that I didn't understand (and he was right); I have been hesitant to express sympathy ever since. Perhaps others have had similar experiences. Yet awkwardness should not keep us from sharing love. Occasionally, our self-conscious desire to not appear foolish will stop us from speaking at all for fear of being shot down. Just because we cannot relate, though, we should not avoid reaching out. It is my earnest belief that sincerity triumphs over ineloquence. People will be touched by our caring gestures, even if the actual words are clumsy or few. While I do not suggest that Christians be quick to offer comfort and advice without thinking, I neither advocate the opposite extreme: thinking about how to comfort someone so much that we never follow through. Have you ever milled around in the church foyer planning exactly what you want to say to someone, only to have him leave before you can say it? People need to know that we care, not that we have the talent to say "just the right thing." Speech free from awkwardness happens only in fiction. As Christians, we must learn that when it is "time to speak," God is calling us to open our mouths to His glory and to the benefit of others.

> "Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon teaches us that part of wisdom is knowing *when*."

We can rarely go wrong by saying "I love you" to someone in pain, as long as we mean those words and are prepared to actively demonstrate that love. It takes little skill in public speaking to tell someone that you are praying for him or her, and both of you will benefit from those prayers. Ask how you can help someone who is struggling, and do not be content with the all-too-easy "Thanks, but I'm fine." response. While not everyone will welcome your help, some people simply need to be asked more than once, and then reassured that they are not a burden to you. If you can relate to another person's difficult situation, let him know you are available to talk about it. As Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 1:4, one blessing that can come from our suffering as Christians is the ability to minister to others who are similarly afflicted. And if you cannot relate, you can still express love. Don't be defeated by thinking, "I don't know what to say to her." In such a case you may not need to say much, but please don't deny someone else the blessing or your encouragement. And don't forget that a hug can sometimes say more than a dozen Hallmark cards. After all, Solomon reminds us that

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Affirmations in Ecclesiasties

SUSAN WALDON

The words of the Preacher of Ecclesiastes emphasize that life without a relationship with God is "meaningless." Only in God does life bring true meaning and pleasure. But even as a Christian, I find a sense of futility can sometimes wear away at my joy and sense of purpose. At such times, Ecclesiastes provides a unique comfort and encouragement — a comfort that comes from several affirmations.

Ecclesiastes affirms that my sense of futility is shared by others. There are days when being an at–home mom seems like the most meaningless of occupations. My son spills juice all over my freshly mopped floor; the dirty clothes stack up before I can get the clean ones folded (let alone put away); one of my children demands a snack just as I finally finish washing the dishes; there's always another meal to cook; nothing ever stays done. It is indeed like "chasing after the wind." It helps me to know that more glamorous occupations can be futile, too— that even being rich, powerful, and important apart from God is meaningless—and that the purpose and joy of my life come from my relationship to God, not from anything I do.

Some years ago, my youngest sister taught me another comforting idea from Ecclesiastes. We were discussing favorite Bible verses and she chose Ecclesiastes 7:3, "Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart." That verse (along with 7:14, "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.") helps me to understand that my comfort is not God's only concern. I confess that there was a time when I envisioned God as a genie. I thought that because God loved me, he would give me whatever I wanted. But then, after the birth of my first son I endured eight months of depression. It was through that experience that God began to kill my self–centeredness, to increase my compassion for those who must deal with difficult situations, and to produce patience in me. Though those were dark days, I drew closer to God than ever before. I came to understand more fully what it meant to be dependant upon Him. My sad face was, indeed, good for my heart, and learning that lesson has made other hurdles more bearable.

Another beautiful and helpful affirmation is found in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:

> "There is a time for everything, and a
> season for every activity
> under heaven:
> a time to be born and a time to die,
> a time to plant and a time to uproot,
> a time to kill and a time to heal,
> a time to tear down and a time to build,
> a time to weep and a time to laugh,
> a time to mourn and a time to dance,
> a time to scatter stones and a time to
> gather them,
> a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
> a time to search and a time to give up,
> a time to keep and a time to throw
> away,
> a time to tear and a time to mend,
> a time to be silent and a time to speak,
> a time to love and a time to hate,
> a time for war and a time for peace."

This passage makes it clear that any present difficulty (or happiness) is temporary. I can endure the hard times if I know they have an end. "This too shall pass" helps me to tie a knot at the end of my rope and hang on. In addition, this passage says that there is a time to let go of one rope and start climbing another. Though change is difficult for me, these verses affirm that God is in the midst of every event — especially new ones.

Two other passages have encouraged me to think in a different way:

"Go eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun — all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10).

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again" (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

I read these verses as a kind of biblical *carpe diem* ("seize the day"): enjoy our life with all your might and don't be afraid to occasionally take a risk. I am very serious and cautious by nature, and I must consciously embrace these ideas or I tend to become dull — too caught up in "chasing after the wind" — too afraid of failure to try to do something that might be wonderful.

That's the whole point, isn't it? Everything is meaningless and dull unless I honor God. Ecclesiastes encourages me when I feel purposeless, comforts me when I am worn out and sad, and challenges me to love life joyfully with all my might.

Susan Waldon is a homemaker—a wife and mother of two sons—who worships at the North Raleigh Church of Christ in Raleigh, NC. Her address is 9029 Bud Smith Rd., Wake Forest, NC 27587.

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there is "a time to embrace" (3:5), especially when words seem inadequate.

While I have focused on Ecclesiastes 3:7, Solomon has much more advice on speaking. He warns that the child of God should not be rash with his or her mouth (5:2), but also acknowledges that even words of wisdom are sometimes despised (9:16). He tells us not to "take to heart everything people say" (7:21), remembering how often we have insulted others or said something we did not mean. Solomon teaches that even the best of our statements may be misinterpreted or rejected, and that we should not be quick to be upset, since along the way we no doubt have misinterpreted the speech of others.

Above all, we must remember that our speech should always be a reflection of God and His Son. We do not speak to glorify ourselves, but Him. As long as we are sincere in our desire to serve others, we should never be ashamed that our speech is not beautiful or worried about how our words will turn out. Consider this comforting thought from Solomon: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives" (3:11-12).

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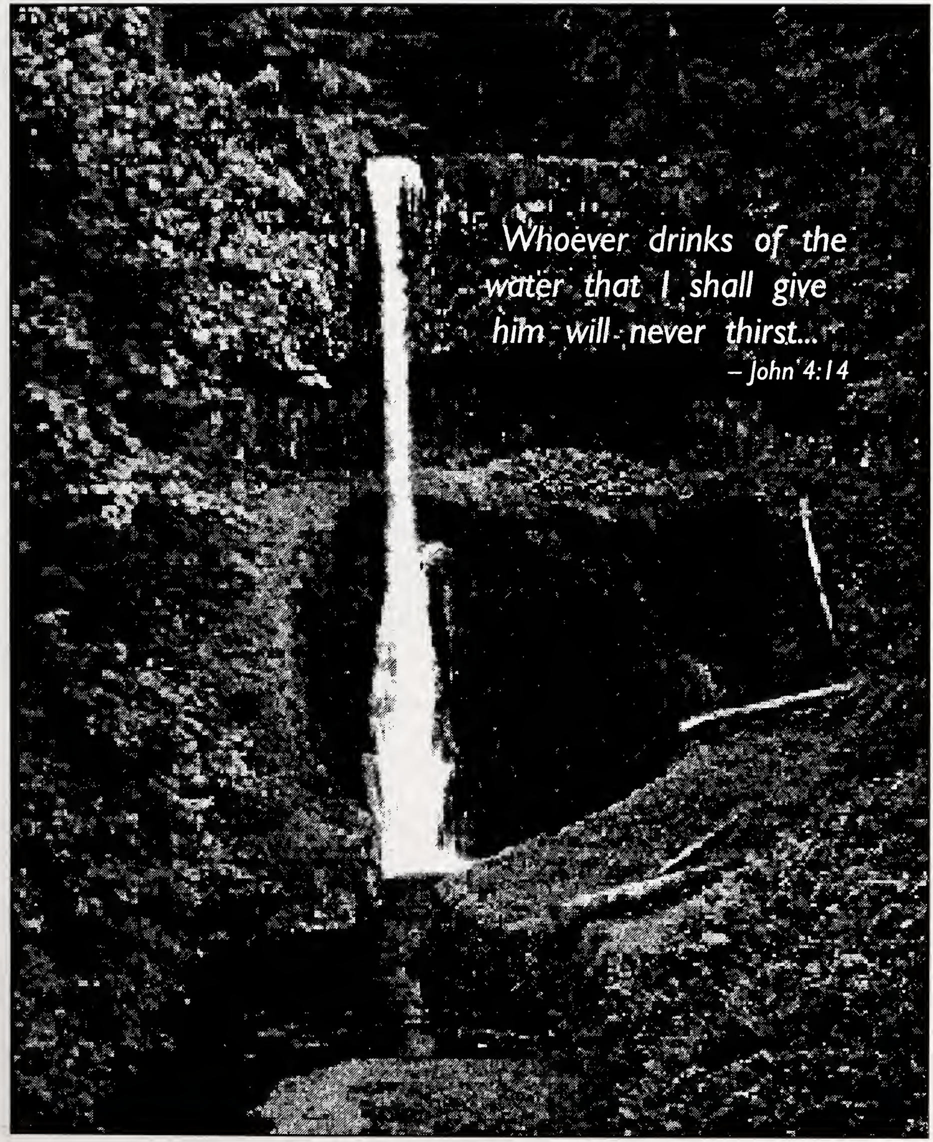

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst...
– John 4:14

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Response to Crisis

DENNIS CONNER

As I recall it began with the movie *Airport*. Then followed a succession of movies like *The Poseidon Adventure*, *The Towering Inferno* and others. They were disaster movies (movies about disasters, though in some cases the movies themselves were the disaster), and they all shared a common thread that tied them together—they explored the different ways that people respond to crisis. In those movies there were cowards, there were those who doubted themselves but then rose to the occasion when crunch time came, and there were those who were natural leaders and responded to crisis with confidence and bravery. And the good movies forced you to ask yourself, "I wonder how I would respond in a situation like that?"

In Acts 4 there is a crisis situation that confronts the young church in Jerusalem. Satanic opposition has reared its ugly head against the people of God; Peter and John have been threatened by powerful people, and they had met the challenge with boldness. But how would the rest of the church respond? In Acts 4:23-31 we have the answer: with *trusting prayer*. In times of spiritual crisis the church's first and natural response is prayer.

Note the characteristics and content of the prayer. First, it was a *collective prayer*. After their release Peter and John immediately sought out the brethren and shared with them what had just happened. Upon hearing the report, Luke says "they raised their voice to God with one accord..."

They prayed together. With one voice and one heart the church approached the throne of grace.

Then as they prayed, *they prayed with a conviction of the sovereignty of God*. Their prayer began with the affirmation, "Lord, You are God." The Greek term for "Lord" used here is different from the term normally used elsewhere in the New Testament. Here it is *despota* (instead of *kurious*), from which the English word "despot" is derived. It carries the connotation of an absolute ruler. In other words, the faith of the church was that the Lord God was in control of all things. As the prayer continued the disciples acknowledged the sovereignty of God in three areas: creation ("who made all things and all that is in them"), revelation ("who by the mouth of Your servant David have said..."), and history ("For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus...both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done"). The God of creation, long before Jesus came into the world, through David had spoken of the opposition the Christ would encounter. God's prophetic word had proved to be true, demonstrating His faithfulness and truthfulness. Yet in their opposition, the powers and authorities of this earth are nothing compared to the Lord God. Their plottings were self–delusions that would be used by the Lord to accomplish His purposes. Even Herod and Pilate were used by God to achieve His divine will. History itself was subject to the power of the sovereign God. In this prayer the church expressed its faith that God was at work, bringing victory out of seeming defeat and using even the evil of man to work out His holy and eternal will.

And note also their *petition*. They asked that the Lord would grant His servants boldness in their proclamation (v. 29). It's interesting that the petition was not for protection, but for boldness to speak. In this moment of crisis they did not shrink from this opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ. Then the disciples prayed for God's accompanying testimony (v. 30, "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus"). The power of God made manifest in healing, signs and wonders would instill that boldness.

Did God answer their prayer? Did He ever! "The place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (v. 31).

This text speaks powerfully to congregations today as they face the times of crisis that inevitably come. First of all, it rasies for us the question of response. Crisis does not always come to us dressed the same way. It may come to us dressed in the battle armor of persecution. Or adorned in the tattered rags of lukewarmness and complacency (which are no less a crisis than persecution). Or in the fine clothes of comfort and ease (the most subtle crisis). How do we respond to the times of crisis? By resorting to our own devices? By seeking escape? By implementing more programs? Or by joining together in the reinforced bonds of collective prayer?

Second, in times of crisis we must trust God to be God. We must prayerfully trust His sovereignty and power. Let God do His work! The God who manipulated history so as to accomplish the miracle of redemption is still in control! We often make the mistake of confining God to the box of our own limited conceptions and expectations. We need to let God out of the box! His methods may be different, but His power has not diminished one whit over the centuries. What is diminished is our trust. We often pray, but then don't expect God to do anything truly significant.

Crisis, when responded to in trusting prayer, is transformed from an obstacle to an opportunity for God to be glorified.

Correction

In Burl Curtis' article *The Marks of Spiritual Maturity* that appeared in the July, 1997 issue, the line that reads, "Their constant prayer is 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,' " should have read, "Their constant prayer is 'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' "

THE CHURCH'S LOSS, HEAVEN'S GAIN

We were saddened to learn that brother *Jackson English*, preacher for the South Lumberton church in Lumberton, NC, passed from this life July 10 after suffering two strokes. Brother and sister English moved to Lumberton in 1966 and established the church there, carrying out one of the longest preaching tenures in the Carolinas. He also began the work in the black community on Highway 1 in Rockingham. That church later merged with the Rockingham church. Brother English served the Lord and the South Lumberton church with dignity and peace. All of us at *Carolina Christian* extend our hearts and prayers to the English family.

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Associate Editorial:

Tempus Fugit!

Jim Mullican

Even the Romans noticed centuries ago that "time flies." We've simply translated their observation into English. And before the Romans, Moses wrote 3400 years ago, "they quickly pass, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10).

We are constantly reminded of the brevity of life by the deaths of friends and relatives. Some live to be 80 or 90, and a few to be 100. Others die at 18 or 20. Yet, many of us seem to think it will never happen to us—at least, not anytime soon. Whereas Satan told Eve in Genesis 3:4, "You will not die," he tells us today, "You will die, but not anytime soon." We believe him—the same father of lies—and so we live without being prepared to die, thinking we'll worry about that when we're older.

Many years ago, when I was 22 or 23, an insurance company projected my life expectancy to be 61 years, nine months. According to that, I've got about twelve years left on this earth. Time may prove them right, but as I run around the track on these hot afternoons, my goal is to beat their estimate and be here for my grandchildren. But I read the obituary page in today's paper and found the deaths of one who was 27, one who was 34, another who was 47, and one who was 50. Of course, most were in their 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's; but I have no assurance of reaching 50, much less 61.

My point is that we're all running blindly in the dark, and we don't know when we'll run into a tree. We're all terminal. We're all dying. We just don't know precisely when the end will come. In light of that sobering truth, shouldn't we all be a lot more concerned about our spiritual health than our physical health?

I don't think I'll ever forget the reaction of a late, beloved sister—Martha Jimison—when she was told that she had cancer and would die. She said, "Well, I'm ready." And she was, too. She was such a help to me in that she would call many of our members every day to see how they were, and if she learned of a sickness or other need she would call and tell me. I miss her, but I am confident she will be there to welcome us into heaven when we arrive.

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Joe Cannon, Director, Highland St. Church of Christ
443 S. Highland Street, Memphis, TN 38111, (901)458-3335

The Fine Art of Forgetting

BOBBY WADE

I often joke, "My forgetter works awfully well!" It's an observation that grows more and more accurate as I grow older. I sometimes feel like the gentleman who commented, "There are two signs of old age: loss of memory and…I can't remember the other one!" However, that's really not the kind of forgetting envisioned in this article.

Memory can be either a blessing or a curse. With it we can summon blessed moments from the past. Without memory, progress would be impossible. Mankind would be doomed forever to repeat the mistakes of the past. Memory is essential; but then, so is forgetfulness.

Paul urged his readers toward "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead" (Philippians 3:13). In so doing, he taught one of the central lessons we must learn if we are ever to be truly happy and contented. As an unknown poet once wrote:

> *"For we know that not every morrow*
> *can be sad,*
> *So forgetting all the sorrows we have*
> *had,*
> *Let us lay aside our tears*
> *And put away our foolish fears,*
> *And through the coming years*
> *Just be glad!"*

What are some of the things Paul may have had in mind when he urged us to practice the fine art of forgetting?

First, he may have been thinking of past mistakes and sins. Of all the weights that press upon us, none is heavier than a guilty conscience. We *should* feel guilty when we have done wrong, else we would not desire to change. As Paul wrote to another church, "Godly sorrow leads to repentancenot to be regretted" (2 Corinthians 7:10). However, once we have received God's forgiveness, it is time to practice what some have referred to as "moral forgetfulness." Accept by faith God's promise of forgiveness. This allows us to replace feelings of guilt with awareness of grace. When Paul remembered that he was once a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man, he also recalled that "I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (I Timothy 1:16). Of course, Paul did not literally forget. This is impossible, short of trauma or disease. He had simply reframed his thinking.

Second, he might have been thinking of past injustices, real or imagined. Recalling these only causes the noxious weed of bitterness to grow and crowds out of our hearts happiness and peace. How good it would be if husbands and wives could "forget" past wrongs and not bring them up every time there is a triggering thought or emotion. How good it would be if some churches could "forget" past church problems and just concentrate on serving Jesus and saving souls!

But how do we forget these kinds of things? First, we allow ourselves to grieve our hurt, with all that that implies. Second, we forgive, or at least practice a forgiving spirit; not necessarily because the offender deserves it anymore than we deserved God's forgiveness, but because God wills it and because of what it will do to us if we don't. Third, when we remember the offense and feel the hurt anew, we simply pray "Thank you, God, that this experience is in the past and that I don't have to go through that any more." Don't relive it, rationalize it, etc.—just pray. Leave it with God when you've done all that you can do.

It's truly sad to see those who have lost the ability to remember. Sadder still are those who never cultivate the ability to forget.

Bobby Wade is a preacher and certified counselor. He can be contacted at 925 South County Rd. and 400 W, Rokport, IN 47635.

Extending Grace

Amos Allen

My mailbox was vandalized recently. This is the third or fourth time in two years. It was left near the post, so I just put it back on. At least it didn't cost me any money this time.

I wanted to get mad at somebody, but I have no idea who did it. My first guess was that teenagers did it, but it may be the widow up the street, or the neighbor who works third shift. Maybe my daughter slipped out of the house and angrily whacked it off the post. Do you think it could have been my wife? How did my son get that bump on his head? I wonder…

I finally decided to concentrate on the repair job. The big questions now are: What amount of emotional energy shall I spend on this incident? How worked up should I get over this earth–shaking act of treachery?

I am involved with a local organization in our town. It's been a difficult year for the group because there have been disagreements. Comments were spoken rashly and statements were heard with defensive ears. Therefore, some dropped out and others have refused to work with one another. Hey, maybe one of them is my Mailbox Mauler!

I am so glad that Christians never get put out with one another, or suspect others of treachery, or separate over petty issues. That would simply be unthinkable among Christians, wouldn't it? Surely we are over that type of behavior, right?

Regrettably we, too, tend to get angry and harbor suspicions. We pull away from others and erect barriers between ourselves. We get our feelings hurt and begin plotting our revenge. If smashing their mailbox was the most destructive thing we ever did to each other, the world would be a better place.

Do you suppose Jesus ever had a desire to rip into someone who was bothering Him? How did He deal with Judas Iscariot on a daily basis, knowing what He did? He was lied to, insulted, abandoned, ignored, used, cursed, rejected, yelled at, and falsely accused. Just like you and me.

What if Jesus Christ had separated from or run off every disciple who messed up? Suppose He had refused to speak to people who weren't perfect like Him. Imagine the Son of Man quitting His job because people disagreed with Him. Can you imagine anyone ever doing such a thing?

Picture this: Jesus, on the cross, looks at the disciples and says, "I love and accept all of you except Peter. I'm mad at him for what he said the other day." Or, what if John 3:16 said, "For God so loved the world (except for teenagers) that He gave…"

That is what we look like when we hold grudges, seek revenge, and divide from one another. Satan has a grand old time whenever we gossip about someone instead of going to him or her. Relationships are seriously damaged whenever we make snide, cynical remarks. There are better things to do—like praying for one another and resolving our differences.

Here's an idea. Let's try extending grace toward each other. It's a better way to live, don't you think? May the grace of Christ be with you.

Amos Allen may be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203. He preaches for the Meadowbrook Rd. Church of Christ.

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Who Holds the Future?

PAUL JARRETT

"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Proverbs 19:21).

This verse has been a great source of comfort to me over the past few months. As I have been subjected to the plans of others and had to make plans of my own, this verse has imparted strength to me. It has reminded me that when all of my plans and the plans of others are complete, it will yet be the Lord's purpose which will prevail.

> "IT HAS REMINDED ME THAT WHEN ALL OF MY PLANS AND THE PLANS OF OTHERS ARE COMPLETE, IT WILL YET BE THE LORD'S PURPOSE WHICH WILL PREVAIL."

It is natural when faced with changes in our lives to ask questions such as: "Why is this happening to me?" "What am I going to do? How will I manage?" "Where will this take me?" "When will this all be resolved?" While all these questions have validity, there is really only one question to which a child of God needs to know the answer. That questions is, "Who holds the future?" The answer to that question is found in the chorus of a favorite song of mine which says:

"Because He lives I can face
tomorrow,
Because He lives all fear is
gone;
Because I know He holds the
future,
And life is worth the living just
because He lives."

Whatever turmoil may be created in our lives by our own plans or the plans of others, we can face the future with confidence if we know the answer to the "who" question. We may not always know the answers to those questions which begin with "why," "what," "how," "where," and "when." However, everything will be all right if we know Who holds the future and we hold tightly to His hand.

Paul Jarret can be contacted at 1824 Tamworth Dr., Charlotte, NC 28210.

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Grandpa Was a Farmer

Rita Watson

For as long as Mother can remember, my Grandpa was a farmer. Every spring he left the barn with his team of horses and plow to prepare those rocky Tennessee fields. He would return to the barn for the seed and then leave again to plant the fields. All through the hot summer Grandpa would return time and again to the barn to gather the necessary items to cultivate, weed and encourage the fields to produce. Then, when the time was right, he left the barn once more and went to the field to harvest the crops and bring them into the barn. One day my mother said, "Never once did I see daddy plant the seed in the barn."

> "Have we become content to sow the gospel message in the barn and never venture with it to the fields?"

Mother's last statement echoed in my mind as I drove away that day. Could it be that as a largely urban society we have missed something in Jesus' agrarian parables? Could it be that the reason the church is not growing as it once did is because we have been planting the seed in the barn?

Often I have heard people say, "What we need is a dynamic pulpit preacher that can teach the lost," or "If I could just get my neighbor to come to church with me, he might hear a sermons that would reach him." We have tried ways to make the church appear "trendy" or "up–to–date" in order to be attractive to today's generation, all with the idea of getting them to join us in the "barn" so that we could plant the seed.

In contrast, Jesus said that the sower "went forth" to sow (Mart 4:3). Have we become content to sow the gospel message in the barn and never venture with it to the fields? Have we begun to believe that we can bring the fields into the barn, instead of going out into the fields? Have we forgotten that Jesus said "Go" out into the world with the seed (Matthew 28:19)?

The fields are where we are to plant and water. We must sow seeds in the fields of our lives: the workplace field, the neighborhood field, the school field, the volunteer field, the social club field, the home field. The fields are where the harvesting is done, as taught by Jesus when He instructed, "...pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). Harvesters are "sent out" to harvest. We cannot harvest the crop that is in the barn.

The church, like the barn, is where we equip to go out to the fields. Jesus gave the church gifts with the specific purpose in mind "...to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). The church is where the harvest is brought, so that it, too, can be equipped to go back out into the fields to sow even more seed.

Yes, Grandpa was a farmer. I'm afraid that in our urban mind set we have sometimes missed the direction of Jesus' rural parables. We today need to "lift up eyes unto the fields..." (John 4:35).

Rita Watson can be contacted at 903 Oak St., Marion, NC 28752.

the eXpress Files: Expressly For Youth

Setting the Pace

DANNY BOGGS

Imagine being charged with the task of teaching a church how to really be God's church! You would surely think that the person given that job would be someone older, wiser,stronger, braver and better than you and me.

In Ephesus the right man for the job was Timothy. Paul wrote him a letter in order to help him teach the Christians there how they "ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Do you think that timothy was older, wiser, stronger, braver and better than you and me? While we don't know exactly how old Timothy was, he was probably younger than many or most of the Christians in Ephesus. And instead of being strong and brave, he was often sick and was also apparently very shy (1 Timothy 5:23; 1 Corinthians 16:10; 2 Timothy 1:7-8). He must have wondered how he could possibly carry out the mammoth duty God had given him?

> ***God wanted Timothy and the whole church to know that being young does not make one a second class citizen in God's kingdom."***

Perhaps the fluttering butterflies in Timothy's stomach took a rest when he read these words from his dear friend Paul, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). The key was to lead by example.

From his infancy Timothy's mother and grandmother had been teaching him the scriptures and sharing their faith with him, and in time Timothy had come to put his own faith in Jesus (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). God wanted Timothy and the whole church to know that being young does not make one a second class citizen in God's kingdom. Living out his godly training would cause people to stop looking down on Timothy and start looking up to him!

Since Christian growth is not a natural by–product of age, committed young people often set the pace for those who are older. In many of the Carolina churches where good things are happening, it is often through the young people that God is making them happen!

With open hearts and minds, young people are learning much more than those of us who think that we've already heard it all. And they're also sharing what they're learning. Teens are leading others to Christ by teaching classes in Sunday school and vacation Bible school, taking mission trips, talking to friends about Christ, inviting others to worship and ministry activities, and even by wearing clothing that proclaims the good news of Jesus.

They are sharing their own valuable time and money to take advantage of growth opportunities and to help those in need. Teens are making it clear to their employers that they won't let work interfere with their responsibilities to God and His people. They are standing for their convictions and values at the toughest time in life to do so. They are taking the initiative to get things done and are filling churches with enthusiasm for their first love!

The express purpose for this column is to put the spotlight on such people in the Carolinas, encourage their growth, and add to their number. If you are a teen with a biblical message you would like to share with your peers through this column, please send it to me for consideration. Articles by adults who love the Lord and young people are also welcome.

Praise God that young Christians are setting the pace with their words, conduct, love, faith and purity!

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville church. If you would like to contribute an article to this column, please feel free to mail it to him at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791-1924.

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Faith Has a Partner

TIM SENSING

Jodie Marie went into the deepest part of the old woods. Her Grandpa had shown her the sacred rock three years before his death. She never dreamed she would ever return to the gloomy moss covered rock that her Grandpa claimed had magic powers. Over the years, Jodie Marie's faith in the sacred rock grew strong. Each night, before she fell asleep, she would dream about the stories her Grandpa told her of the mystical rock's divine powers. Every story ended the same way, "So, Jodie Marie, never forget that every ninety years the one who stands upon the rock shouting 'UGCLALAUG' will receive a special blessing." Now she stood atop that old rock anticipating the midnight hour. "UGCLALAUG," she yelled. Nothing. "I believe!" she screamed even louder. Still nothing. Years later, rocking back and forth in her Grandpa's cane chair, Jodie Marie, with unwavering faith, told her grandchildren the sacred stories of her youth.

"TRUE FAITH HAS A PARTNER, AND HIS NAME IS GOD."

Before Dagon's temple all of the city of Ashdod danced as they brought the ark of the Lord before their god. "When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained" (I Samuel 5:3-4). The people of Ashdod sent the ark of the Lord away, for they knew a heavy hand was against them and Dagon their god. Meanwhile, months after the towns of Philistia had sent the ark of the Lord away, they danced again with unwavering faith before the temple of their god.

In a town near Israel, the city officials ordered a tree cut out of the forest. The craftsman shaped it with his chisel. The people adorned it with silver and gold. They fastened it with hammer and nails so it would not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, they beheld their god who could not speak. They carried their god from place to place, for he could not walk. They longed to know wisdom from an idol with eyes that could not see, with nose that could not smell, and with hands that could not feel (Jeremiah 10; Psalm 115, 135). With unwavering faith this city grew to become like their idol. They could not see the truth, or hear wisdom, or speak an encouraging word, or feel their brother's embrace.

The Fairfield Country Club Tea was well attended. The talk abounded of how well Congress could do if only the liberals would get out of the way; then the states would have their constitutional authority to rebuild America. Loren Lawyer and his golf mates disagreed. "How can we possibly protect the rights of the disenfranchised if we do not legislate new policies," they argued. However, they all agreed to their unwavering faith in the democratic process and the greatness of America.

The elders reviewed the minutes from their last meeting. The treasurer predicted a healthy financial future. Assets and earnings were up 27%. The planning committee reported progress on all fronts due to the extensive research conducted by the consulting firm of Manly, Powers & Depends. Similarly, the rest of the minutes reported that all programs and staff members were running efficiently on all cylinders. The homeless people were moved to the shelter in the next town. The widows were organized into a bridge club. The orphans were assigned to the Children's Home. The hungry were given gift certificates. The lost read an advertisement in the local paper. No problems reported; subsequently, no prayer requests were made. The meeting adjourned with the budget being praised and the attendance records honored. They would meet again with unwavering faith in order to conduct more business on the Lord's behalf.

Meanwhile, four families gathered for morning assembly on the other side of the hill. They sang *Amazing Grace*. They wept during the Supper. They collected $500 for the Crawfordville family that had been burned out the night before. They gathered their tools left over from remodeling widow Smith's kitchen. They, with unwavering prayer, talked with God.

Everyone has faith. The atheist has faith in his theories and facts. The newborn has faith in her mother's loving arms. The pagan has faith in his local deity. Couples have faith in their love. The citizen trusts the government; the athlete trusts her talent; the CEO trusts his leadership; the broker trusts the market. We all have faith in something; faith never stands alone. Faith has an object. No matter how strong or unwavering that faith becomes, none of these objects can give life.

True faith has a partner, and His name is God.

Tim Sensing can be contacted at 649 Barr Rd., Lexington, SC 29072.

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Heart Problems

Peter Rode

In His letter to the church in Ephesus, Christ warns them that if they do not repent, "…I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:5). I understand the lampstands to represent the seven churches of Asia to whom John is addressing his epistle (1:20), and therefore infer from Jesus' warning that He means He will no longer recognize the church at Ephesus as a church that belongs to Him. In other words, Christ would withdraw His presence from them as well as the presence of the Holy Spirit. That's quite a serious threat.

> "Their religious forms and convictions had outlived their love for Christ."

What exacerbates the problem even more is that the Ephesians had done nothing overtly wrong! They were praised for persevering and enduring hardships for the name of Jesus (2:3). They had done good deeds (2:2) and withstood wrong teaching (2:2, 6). They were known for hating evil. Yet, Jesus accused them of leaving their first love. It was an internal problem, a problem of the heart which only the individual and God could know. In other words, although everything looked right on the outside, there was something wrong on the inside. Their Christianity was no longer coming from the heart. Their religious forms and convictions had outlived their love for Christ.

We must never think this same problem cannot happen to us today in the waning years of the twentieth century. Wayne Jacobsen put his finger on the problem when he wrote, "Today God is an abstraction, existing in an unseen and unfelt spiritual realm. People can only please him by following his rules—going to church, tithing, and being good to their neighbor. But God wants to be so much more real than that. He wants to be closer than our best friend and to participate in our daily lives" (*A Passion for God's Presence*, Harvest House, 1991, p. 48). The problem is even greater today because from our "scientific" point of view we find it extremely difficult to "see" the spiritual realm.

A. W. Tozer once remarked, "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95% of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the New Testament church 95% of what they did would stop and everybody would know the difference." I understand that Tozer was looking at American religion in general, but there is a lot of truth in what he said and we might be closer to being in the condition of the Ephesian congregation than we care to think.

Our responsibility is always to ensure that our religion is from the heart. If our practice of Christianity is removed from human experience, it ceases to be Christianity.

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Northview Celebrates 25th Anniversary

JIM SMITH

The 25th anniversary of the Northview Church of Christ in Statesville, NC, will be celebrated October 4-5, 1997. It is our hope that any and all former members will make plans to help us celebrate this important milestone. Our celebration will not be complete without you.

The Northview church held its first worship service August 20, 1972. There were 20 people present for that first service. On December 12, 1972 Max Reed came from Kansas to serve as the congregation's first full–time preacher. In 1976 brother Reed left to do mission work in Ghana, and on May 9 of that year Stanley Crews began a long and fruitful ministry with Northview.

The first elders were appointed in 1983. They were Gerald Boan, Lowery Lanier, Jim Smith and John Smith, and three of these are still serving today. John Smith moved in 1985. On February 2, 1986 Walter Edwards followed Stanley Crews, who had retired as the pulpit minister. Brother Edwards served the congregation well until his own retirement in December, 1996. Rick Bartlett and Tim Pinkston were added to the eldership in October, 1996. Brother Pinkston also serves as the associate minister.

Dan Waller is the new preacher at Northview, having just moved here in July of this year. Others who have served the congregation in the past are Kirk Sams, who was the youth minister from 1983-91, and John Reilly, who served as a full time missionary to Russia from 1994-97.

The Northview church has been a leader in many specialized ministries that help people across the state and country, such as the relief efforts for the Midwest flood victims and victims of recent hurricanes that battered the North Carolina coast. Northview also hosts an annual youth rally that has become one of the most popular in the state.

NORTHVIEW
CHURCH OF CHRIST

Pictured above, left to right, Dan Waller (preacher), Jim Smith, Gerald Boan, Rick Bartlett, Lowery Lanier and Tim Pinkston.

Jesus Christ

W. L. Hutchins

Thou art the reason of my birth;
Thou art the Savior of my soul;
Thou mad'st my sinful life of worth;
Thou mad'st my broken visions whole.

Didst make Thy cross a healing rod —
Of time an everlasting span.
Didst teach the Fatherhood of God,
Didst live the Brotherhood of man.

When fellowhip my soul desires
I call thee man, for such Thou art;
When leprous soul for health aspires,
As God I bring Thee to my heart.

I love Thee with my soul, my mind,
With strength of hand and consious will,
And in this love each day I find
The power life's mission to fulfill.

All I possess is ever Thine
To mold and use as Thou dost will,
For Thou hast given power divine
To life me toward Thy visions still.

My brow awaits Thy thorny crown,
My hands invite the rusty nail;
Thy bloody Cross pray let me own —
I'll die for Thee without a wail.

Brotherhood News

— Mike Mobley

LUBBOCK, TX... At the end of May the Sunset International Bible Institute completed 35 years of Bible and ministry training. In that period of time more than 4,000 students have completed the school's various disciplines and training programs. Two thousand have graduated the two year preacher training programs. The 41 graduates from the 1997 class are committed to serve in seven foreign nations and nine states in the US. Truitt Adair is the Director of the Institute.

HARARE, ZIMBABWE... One hundred years ago this year John Sherriff, a missionary from New Zealand, entered the nation of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) carrying with him the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today there are more than 200 congregations of the churches of Christ in this African nation.

FLORENCE, AL... International Bible College announces its 26th Annual Workshop, September 24-27. This year's theme is "Alternative: Progress Without Compromise."

NASHVILLE, TN... The Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort is asking for financial support to continue its ministry of physical, material, and spiritual benevolence to brotherhood congregations, their members, and neighbors. If you are interested in helping, contact Joe Dudney, Executive Director, at 410 Allied Dr., Nashville, TN 37211.

RALEIGH, NC... The Rochester Heights Church of Christ will be conducting its third annual Homecoming Celebration Oct. 31-Nov. 2. The celebration theme is "Fix Your Thoughts on Jesus." The keynote speaker will be Andrew Harriston of the Simpson St. church in Atlanta, GA. For more information contact Michael Dublin at 1805 Waller Place, Raleigh, NC 27610, or call (919) 832-1277.

CHARLOTTE, NC... *David French* is the new preacher for the Archdale Church of Christ. Brother French formerly preached in Martin, TN.

GREER, SC... The Sixth Annual Palmetto Biblical Studies will be hosted by the Greer Church of Christ Oct. 12-16. This year's theme is "According to God's Eternal Purpose." Twenty seven scheduled speakers will be addressing 28 subjects. For more information call the church office at (864) 877-8951.

ROCKINGHAM, NC... TheRockingham Church of Christ is in search of a new preacher. Sunday morning worship attendance is approximately 50. Interested applicants should send a resume and sermon tape to the church at P.O. Box 95, Rockingham, NC 28379; or contact Earl Johns at (910) 582-1867.

CHARLOTTE, NC... The Westside Church of Christ will host the Third Annual Theological Symposium on September 27. The theme is "A Theological Study of the Book of Acts." Speakers will be Larry Mathis, Shawn Mathis, Earl West, James Meadows, and Bill Bowen. Westise will also be conducting a gospel meeting with Earl West September 26-28. For more information call the church office at (704) 392-6494.

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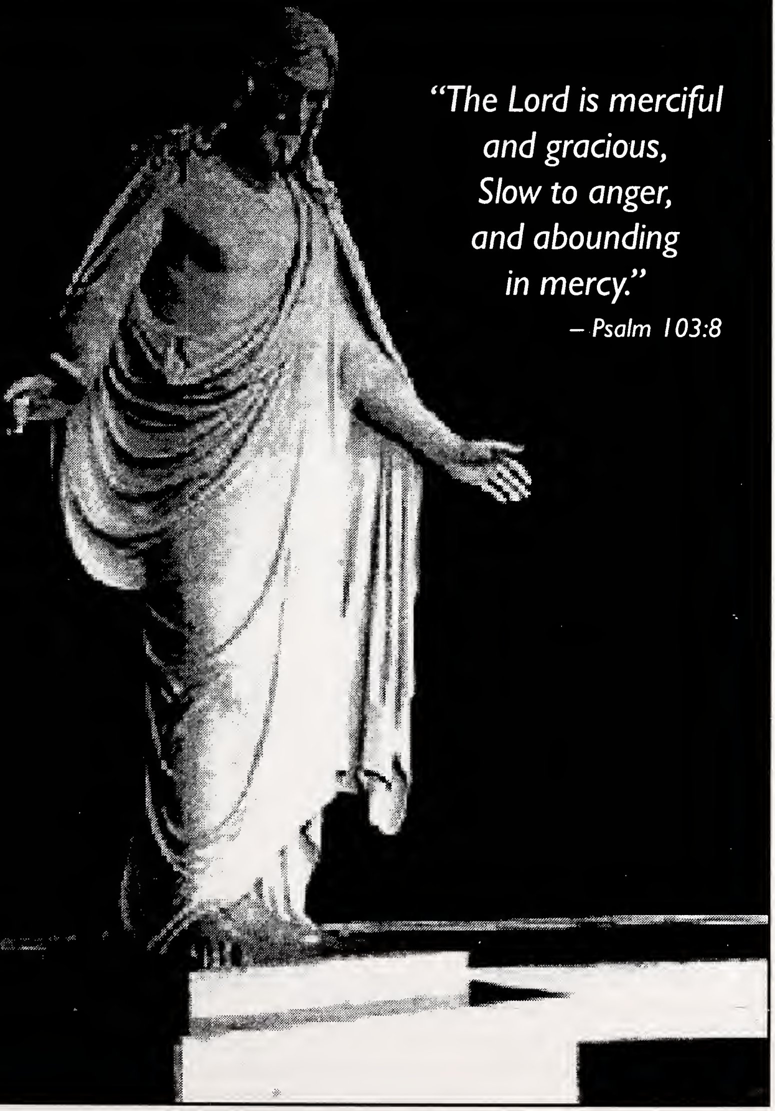

"The Lord is merciful
and gracious,
Slow to anger,
and abounding
in mercy."
– Psalm 103:8

CAROLINA christian

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A Childlike Faith

Dennis Conner

While cruising down the information highway recently I came across a document of childrens' letters to God. The original source was not cited in the internet document, but I have subsequently discovered that they are actually from the book *Children's Letters to God*, compiled by Stuart Hample and Eric Marshall (Workman Publishing, New York, NY, 1991). The letters themselves were apparently actual letters addressed to God that ended up stranded at various post offices. They are funny, innocent, thoughtful and quite revealing. I thought I would share a few of them with you in the hope that they would touch your heart as they did mine.

One of the immediate things that impressed me about these letters was the childrens' desire for God's approval. I begin with one from a little girl named Marnie. She demonstrates a sensitivity for political correctness with her letter. It reads, "Dear God, On Halloween I am going to wear a devil's costume. Is that all right with you?" We should all be so concerned with what might be offensive to God.

Anita's concern, however, was a little more immediate. She was worried about her dad and asked, "Dear God, Is it true my father won't get in heaven if he uses his bowling words in the house?"

And Neil seemed to be a good boy who had apparently been taking to heart his mother's instructions about how to behave in worship. "Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that OK?"

Other letters revealed a simple but forthright honesty. Whether it came to petitions, complaints or even rebukes, these kids spoke straight from the heart. Joyce wrote, "Dear God, Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy." There was no question about how Denise felt when she wrote, "Dear God, If we come back as something please don't let me be Jennifer Horton because I hate her!" Norma wanted to know, "Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?" And this profound poem came from Daniel, age 8:

"Dear God, here's a poem:
I love you
because you give us what we need to live
But I wish you would tell me why
you made it so we have to die."

There were a couple of letters that revealed a sense of wonder and puzzlement at God's greatness, such as the one from Lucy. She asked, "Dear God, Are you really invisible or is that just a trick?" A youngster named Eugene offered this compliment, "Dear God, I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset on Tuesday. That was cool!"

And then there were letters that expressed a real concern and heart for God, such as the one from a little girl named Donna. Her letter read, "We read Thomas Edison made light. But in Sunday school they said you did it. So I bet he stoled your idea." Her concern was that God get the credit He deserved! Good for you Donna. Elliott let his heart show when he wrote, "Dear God, I think about you sometimes even when I'm not praying." And this note from Nora touched my heart deeply, "Dear God, I don't ever feel alone since I found out about you." That's simple faith.

How different the church and the world

would be if we hardened, cynical adults could learn somehow to once again see God through the eyes of a child. Perhaps that is what Jesus had in mind when He said, "...Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." Now, I'm not about to suggest that children are all perfect and flawless. I drive an elementary school bus and know better than that! Still, there is a certain innocence and naivete they possess that is so often lacking in our faith and our understanding of God. I don't know about you, but sometimes I find myself longing for a faith that seeks only the approval of God and not others and a faith that is honest and forthright in prayer. I want once again to be thrilled by His sheer greatness, to be puzzled by His deep mystery, and to possess a heart that is filled with thoughts of Him. I pray for the faith to be bold when my Lord is discredited and dishonored.

May God help us all to be more childish.

Church Directory is Ready

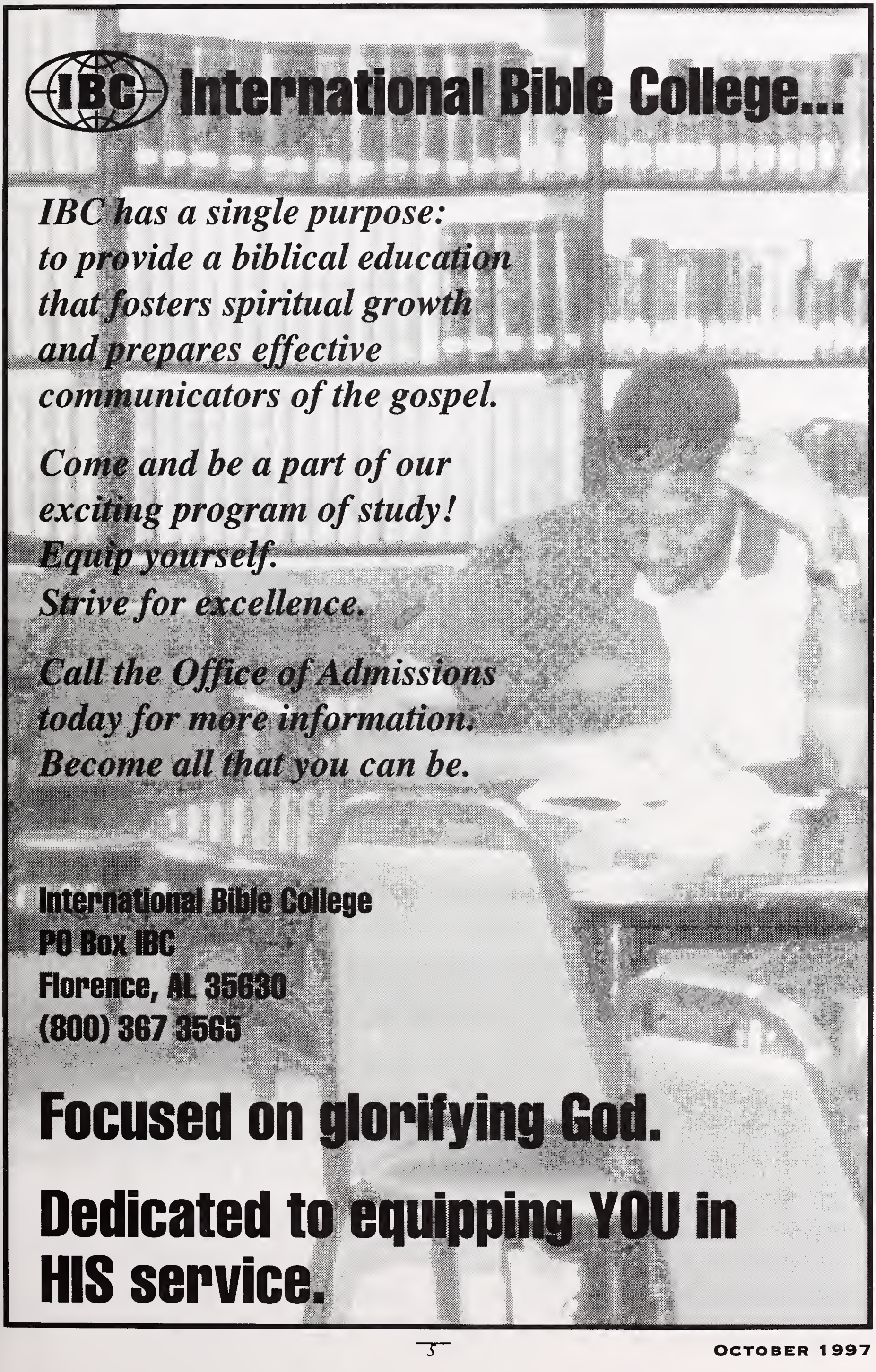
Several have asked about the Directory of Churches of Christ in the Carolinas. We apologize for the delay, but the directory is now available. If you have not already ordered your copy, you can do so now by contacting Jerry Senn at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28739, telephone number (704) 693-0306. Carolina Christian Books & Gifts will also have the directory. You can call them at 1-800-343-1081. The cost for 1-4 copies is $5, with five or more copies costing $3.50 each.

OUR SINCERE CONDOLENCES

We have just recently learned of the death of sister Jeanette Tripp, beloved wife of Gilbert Tripp, preacher for the church in Roanoke Rapids, NC. She passed from this life the first of September following a long battle with cancer. Our prayers are with brother Tripp and his family.

We were also saddened by the passing of brother Don Nix, preacher for the church in Union, SC. Don had been battling a brain tumor for more than a year and went to be with his Lord in early September (we apologize that we do not have the exact date). In addition to his preaching ministry, brother Nix was also the editor of *The Palmetto Messenger*. Our prayers and thoughts go out to his family as well.

We do rejoice, however, in the hope shared by our brother and sister. Thanks be to God who through Christ Jesus has given us victory over death.



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Associate Editorial:

An Unforgivable Sin

Jim Mullican

In Mark 3:28-30 Jesus said, " 'I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.' He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.' "

Many people have worried themselves tremendously over this subject. They want to be faithful Christians, but feel they have sinned to such an extent as to be unforgivable. However, a careful examination of the context should reassure anyone. Jesus was working miracles—this could not be denied by the teachers of the law. This meant He had supernatural power from one of two sources: either God or Satan. Since they didn't accept Him as the Son of God, they concluded that He was a child of Satan. Therein lay their sin.

Rejecting Jesus as the Son of God is the unforgivable sin. Since forgiveness is found only in Christ (Acts 2:38; 4:12), those who reject Him cannot be forgiven. However, for those who accept Him as Savior, there is no sin too great to be covered by His blood.

For instance, murderers of Jesus Himself were told in Acts 2:38 to "repent and be baptized…for the forgiveness of your sins." But what about involvement in Satanism? In Acts 19:19-20, new Christians at Ephesus who had been involved in the occult burned the books they had used in their former occult practices. They had been forgiven. What about lives scarred by repeated divorce and remarriage? In John 4, Jesus welcomed a woman who had been married five times and was then living in open adultery with a sixth man she had not married.

God is not so much concerned with where we've been as with where we're going. As Paul put it, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Those who are willing to change their attitudes and seek salvation in Christ will find a welcome there. Refusing to seek that salvation is the unforgivable sin, and the greatest possible tragedy in life.

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c/o Jim Thompson, 1124 Tabor St.,
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Father, Forgive Them

Johnny Melton

Elizabeth I, Queen of England, died in 1603. She is reputed to have said to the Countess of Nottingham, “God my forgive you, but I never can.” What a striking contrast to the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Jesus could have prayed many things at that moment. He could have commanded a legion of angels to rescue Him, but He didn't. Jesus died as He had lived; His habit in life was to pray. He taught His disciples to pray and not to grow weary. How fitting, then, that the first words to pass His lips as He was crucified were words of prayer. As a matter of fact, three times from the cross Jesus would pray. His first words we have already noted, “Father, forgive them…” The seventh and final statement were the words, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” The other prayer was in the form of the anguished cry, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” So, as Jesus entered His suffering, He prayed; as He endured His suffering, He prayed; and as the Lord emerged from His suffering, He prayed.

> “JESUS FORGAVE HIS ENEMIES. HE PRAYED FOR THEM. AND WE DARE DO NO LESS.”

As we consider the short but eloquent prayer of forgiveness, our attention is drawn first to the One Jesus addressed — His Father. I often hear folks say, “I can't talk to God after all I've been through. I can't pray anymore. I don't have any faith left. If God were there, He wouldn't let me suffer so much.” But look at Jesus. Hated for doing good. Beaten for telling the truth. Deserted by His closest friends. Allowed to suffer by His heavenly Father. Hear the mocking and taunting. See the crude spital on His face, the crown of thorns thrust into His brow. Witness His body racked with agony. Humiliated. Scorned. Who among us has experienced the hurt, the heartache, the disappointment, the pain that He endured? And yet Jesus could still pray, “Father…”

Jesus' faith remained intact. When we find ourselves in the depths of despair, let us never blame God; rather, let us continue to call on Him as our Father. He sees. He cares. He blesses.

Second, note His appeal, “Forgive.” The word *forgive* means to dismiss, to remit, to send away. As Jesus was executed for crimes He did not commit, His heart was free of malice and ill–will. He did not cry out for justice or righteous retribution. Instead, He pled for mercy. Once more Jesus practiced in the face of death the message He had taught daily while He lived. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus preached, “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…”

Peter Miller lived during the Revolutionary War. He was a preacher in Pennsylvania. Everyone loved Miller, except for one man. This man was accused and later convicted of treason and was sentenced to die. Peter Miller walked 60 miles to meet with General George Washington, begging Washington to pardon the man. Washington replied, “I'm sorry that I cannot grant your request for your friend." "Friend!" exclaimed Miller, "Why, the man is the worst enemy I have in the world." Washington was stunned. He responded, "Have you walked 60 miles to save the life of an enemy? That, in my judgment, puts the matter in a different light. I will grant the pardon for your sake." Miller, with pardon in hand, walked another 15 miles to the site of the execution. The condemned man saw Miller approaching and remarked, "There is Peter Miller. He has come all the way from Ephrata to have his revenge by seeing me hung." But Miller pushed his way through the crowd and handed the condemned man the pardon that saved his life.

Peter Miller had learned the spirit of Christ.

Jesus forgave His enemies. He prayed for them. And we dare do no less.

But someone says, "I can't forgive him. He has hurt me too badly. Besides, he has admitted to nothing and hasn't even asked for my forgiveness." Listen to the text. Do you hear the executioners saying, "Forgive me, Jesus?" Do you hear the rulers pleading, "Forgive us, Jesus?" What I hear is "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Let His blood be upon us and our children!" I hear mocking and ridicule, but I don't hear any cries for forgiveness. In the absence of any plea or cry for forgiveness, Jesus was willing to forgive anyway.

The spirit of Christ, then, is a spirit of forgiveness. Is there someone who has hurt your feelings? Forgive him. Is there one who has repeatedly disappointed you? Forgive him. Do you have those who are against you? Forgive them. Forgive them all, even your enemies.

Now, you may forgive someone his trespass against you, but that doesn't satisfy his responsibility before God. As far as God is concerned the blot of sin still remains until it is cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Those who called for Jesus' death were not actually forgiven of their sins for salvation until by faith they repented and were baptized into Christ, receiving the benefits of His sacrifice for sin. Still, the prayer of Jesus teaches us that we must possess a spirit and a willingness to forgive those who wrong us and sin against us. The spirit of forgiveness is a freeing spirit, releasing us from bitterness, vindictiveness, vengefulness and a self–condemning hardness of heart.

Hear the prayer of Jesus. Witness the heart of Jesus. And imitate the spirit of Jesus. Forgive.

Johnny Melton, a former editor of ***Carolina Christian,*** *preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, Mississippi. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 651, West Point, MS 39773.*

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Carolina Christian Classic Reprint:

A Growlery

HOWARD WINTERS

There are some things that we seem to have become experts in, one of which is quarrelling among ourselves. While we have not cornered the market on it, we seem to have surpassed our religious neighbors in the art. Good men and leaders in the church have sought a solution to this problem since apostolic times, but with little or no success. But all may not be utterly hopeless, providing we are willing to apply a simple solution.

Charles Dickens, in *Bleak House,* has Jarndyce, one of his characters, say to another one, Esther Summers, "Sit down, my dear. This, you must know, is the growlery. When I am out of humor, I come and growl here."

Having had some personal experience with growling and seeing its utter uselessness for any constructive purpose, to have a growlery struck us as being a brilliant idea. We immediately concluded, upon seeing Dickens' statement, that everyone should have a growlery of his own. Such a place would always be helpful when we get out of humor, but especially in the following situations:

> "The truth about the matter is that much of the recent problem of division in churches is caused by growlers who are discontent and unable to live in peace with their brothers in Christ."

In the Home

The happiness and serenity of many a home has been destroyed by growling and quarrelling among the members who make it up, most of which is pointless and useless, as well as making life miserable for those around us. The kind of quarrelling that characterizes many homes led Solomon to observe, "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house." And again, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman," (Proverbs 21:9, 19. And of course, the same would apply to a contentious man). Growling is an unprofitable business, doing no one any good. It should therefore be kept as private as possible.

But in the home we growl at each other for the most trifling causes, usually using it as an outlet to vent our frustration. We thus growl at each other, not because of the weaknesses and failures of the other, but because of our own problems and discontents. We get angry, disgusted, and out of sorts with ourselves and then growl at the other members of the family. This is like kicking the cat because the dog bites. But that is the way we are, at least a good deal of the time.

And for this reason it seems to us that a private growlery, often used, might remedy the problem, and save many marriages. At the very least, it would prevent growling at another for the wrong reasons.

In the Church

The very nature of the church suggests that here is one place everyone ought to be able to live free of growling and contention, but not so. Even the church in apostolic times had its growlers (cf. I Corinthians 3:1-4; 14:33; James 3:14-18). It would be too much to think that we could escape them entirely.

There has never been a church, and probably never will be one, that has not had problems (some say they do not have them, but they just call them by another name and a church problem by any other name is a church problem still). And this will continue to be the case as long as churches are composed of a human element. At least five of the seven churches addressed by the Lord in Revelation 2 and 3 were overloaded with problems. Paul dealt with at least a dozen problems in his first letter to the Corinthians. Problems *per se* are not the thing that should concern us; how we handle them is.

When a church has problems it can deal with them in one of two ways:

(1)

Face the issues, grapple with the difficulties, get to the root of the problems, and apply Scriptural solutions. This is the way all peaceful churches handle them, and they usually handle them so peacefully that the problems are rarely recognized as such.

(2)

Permit the growling Christians (and nearly all churches have them) to go through the whole congregation doing nothing but growling about the problems until their growling causes frustration, confusion, and division. But rather than solving the problems, growling only adds another one to them. To prevent this second method from being widely practiced, it seems to us that an excellent idea would be for each church to have its own growlery, and when certain ones (whose one talent seems to be to growl) have to growl, they could be sent to the growlery and there growl in private (there would probably be enough growling for them to keep a constant vigilance at its shrine). If there is any place for growling in the church, surely it must be in such a growlery. And if such was used, and used often, it would certainly prevent a good deal of heartaches and disappointments in the Lord's work. It seems to us that with a growlery the growling Christians would be able to growl (in private) while the working Christians worked (in public).

In the Brotherhood

There are, as unfortunate as it may be, brotherhood growlers, especially among editors, writers, and some preachers who do their growling in the pulpit, both at home and abroad. What a blessing it would be to the world, and to the church, if such men could have a central growlery to which they could go from time to time to do their growling to one another or in private, rather then doing it through the papers and from the pulpit. Space in papers should be reserved for a positive presentation of truth and a sound logical refutation of error rather than growling at one another and venting our frustrations about brotherhood problems, which growlings and ventings cause far more problems than they solve. The pulpit should be reserved for the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is far too holy to use as a growlery or a place to express our vengeance on all those who differ with us in matters of judgment, expediency, and opinion.

Dickens had Esther say to Jarndyce, when he told her about his growlery, "You must be there very seldom, sir." "Oh, you don't know me!" he returned. "When I am deceived or disappointed in the wind and it's easterly, I take refuge here. The growlery is the best–used room in the house. You are not aware of half my humors yet." Most of us feel that we need to occasionally growl "at the wind and it's easterly" (which is about as good as anything to growl at), but should we do it openly and publicly? Would not growling in private do just as well?

The truth about the matter is that much of the recent problem of division in churches is caused by growlers who are discontent and unable to live in peace with their brothers in Christ. Thus, the problem could easily be solved if the growlers would establish for themselves a private growlery in which to do their growling rather than growl at the brotherhood. Growling in public rarely does any good whatsoever; nothing would therefore be lost if all were done in secret.

Conclusion

The wise man had a word to say about public growling. He wrote, "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards" (Proverbs 29:11). Perhaps *The Amplified Version* will make this plainer: "A [self–confident] fool utters all his anger, but a wise man keeps it back and stills it."

The foregoing editorial by Howard Winters first appeared in the September, 1982 issue of ***Carolina Christian.*** *Brother Winters considered it one of his personal favorites.*

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the eXpress Files: A Column For Youth

Ready to Answer

DANNY BOGGS

As I stepped out of my truck and headed for the door at Wal–Mart, I saw a television news reporter and her cameraman standing out front. "Here's my big chance," I thought. If I timed my entry just right, she would ask me my opinion about something. My face and voice could be splattered all over television screens in four states that night!

I craftily made my approach just as another guy finished giving his view. The reporter then called out to me, "Sir, what is your name?" I'd known the answer to that question for at least 25 years! "Danny Boggs," I said. "And where do you live?" she asked. It had only been a year–and–a–half since we had moved there, but my memory refused to break under the pressure. "Flat Rock," I replied.

Unfortunately, after that the questions only got harder. "Do you think the man who found the dead body of suspected murderer Andrew Cunanan and called the police should get the reward money that had been offered for information leading to his arrest and conviction?" Do I what? Couldn't she have asked me something about the National League Pennant race, or how I felt about the cool July weather, or what I was doing at Wal–Mart?

I mulled her question over for a couple of seconds and finally answered, "Yes." "Why?" she challenged. My beating heart and racing mind crashed furiously as I struggled to come up with a reason that would get me on TV. The best this university–trained professional speaker could come up with was, "I don't know." Well–reasoned opinions and even elaborate, stupid ideas make the evening news. "I don't know" gets you no airtime, no fame, no glory. I watched the broadcast in vain for my bumbling appearance that night. Fortunately, my ignorance and unpreparedness cost no one but me anything.

What if, instead, a friend asked me, "What makes you think you are going to heaven when you die?" The answer to that question could affect my friend and me for eternity!

Peter wrote, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (I Peter 3:15). One way that we show that Christ is number one in our hearts and lives is to be ready to tell anyone why we have the hope Christ gives. In I Peter 1:3-4, Peter said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade — kept in heaven for you."

God wants us to be able to tell why we believe in Him, why we believe Jesus is His Son, how we were born again thanks to Christ's resurrection, and why heaven is our hope. We can't really call Jesus Lord if we don't try to keep learning God's Word and thinking through our faith (Luke 6:46).

Our Father expects us not only to know the answers, but also to share with people the right attitude. We should tell people about our hope with an attitude of gentleness and genuine courtesy, and with reverence toward God. We also need to "walk the walk" so that we can "talk the talk" with good consciences.

So, always be ready to share your faith and honestly answer questions about your hope. Not only may those who don't believe in Christ or His words be put to shame, but they may even learn to glorify God with you (I Peter 2:12)!

Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791-1924.

Denial to the End

G. Daniel Payne

There was a recent death in the scientific community that was notable for the prominence of the individual who passed away and his steadfast refusal to acknowledge God. The acclaimed astronomer Carl Sagan was a professed agnostic. When asked on his death bed if he would now acknowledge that there was a God, Sagan was reported to have replied that during his lifetime he had not seen any evidence to prove the existence of God. This is the man who looked at the stars and could not discern the presence of a supreme being in the expanse of the universe.

The billions and billions of stars that were the essence of Sagan's life work would surely tempt one to wonder if the cosmos could have been produced by chance. No, this skeptic was unable to see the true beauty of the creation. For Sagan, the "Big Bang" — the eruption of cosmic substance from the void of emptiness into a mass of energy in a twinkling of time — was no doubt the explanation for creation. Pardon me — the explanation for an "accident of time and space."

There are, of course, men and women of great minds who accept the creation story of Scripture. The evidence available to them is the same as that which was available to Carl Sagan. I do not desire to belittle the beliefs of Sagan or any other scientist who gravitates toward the accidental creation and evolution of all that is to behold in the universe; but just as we sometimes say there are those who do not see "the forest for the trees," Sagan could not see the creation for the star dust in his eyes. The unfolding of all the natural beauty of God's creation surely expresses itself to the eye of the scientist as well as the believer.

The book of Genesis is about beginnings: the beginning of the universe and the beginning of man. "In the beginning God created" is a notion that awakens a sense of awe in the believer and a knowledge that God is the Creator and that His relationship with His people is special. In Psalm 102:25 the psalmist proclaims, "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands." This means that the power and ordered way of natural things are in the province of God. The gravity that binds us to the earth, the elements that rule the seasons, and the immensity of the heavens are all the scientific proof we earth creatures need for acceptance of His sovereignty.

There is also a spiritual side of the equation. One must believe that there is a Creator in order to share the special relationship that exists between God and His people. God made a promise to Eve (Genesis 3:15) and He made a promise to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 22:15). If, like Sagan, you refuse to believe in the God that promised a Redeemer for His people and provided the cosmos for your study, then you have only a short sojourn on earth to come to grips with your eternal resting place. There is no joy, promise or awe in a skeptic's non–belief.

There is no real way to know what was on Carl Sagan's mind when he refused to accept God. We all have a choice and to accept the emptiness of non–belief is beyond my grasp. "Look out to the world and know that the heavens and earth were created (*by God*, GPD) in vast array" (Genesis 2:1).

G. Payne Daniel is a member of the Brooks Ave. church in Raleigh, NC. He can be contacted at PO Box 40202, Raleigh, NC 27629.

Is It of God?

DAVID DAILY

Recently I helped a brother with a small job. While we were busy with the job he asked me a question I've been asked several times before regarding a program that is an issue with many people today. As I reflected on his question I came to realize it was the very same question Christians have asked through the years about any number of matters. Underlying them all is the real matter of concern: "Is this of God?"

Allow me to suggest some guidelines that will help you make a responsible decision the next time you are faced with this question.

1. **Compare what you see, read and hear with the Word of God.** The Bible is our complete and infallible guide in all matters spiritual. Paul urged Timothy to study the Word so he need never be ashamed by his handling of the Scriptures. Familiarity with the Scriptures solves a multitude of problems. A word of caution, however: just be careful you don't fall victim to the old trap of seeking to justify what you want to believe about a matter.

2. **Test the spirits of those involved.** I John 4:1-3 instructs us to test the spirits, or teachings, of those who teach us. The test is: Does this teacher (and by extension movement, magazine, etc.) proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior? Who is being glorified? If it isn't Jesus, then no Christian will want to have anything to do with it. It really doesn't take long to discover if the focus is on Jesus or something or someone else.

3. **Pay attention to the fruit it produces.** This is simply another way of saying, "Watch for the effect it has in peoples' lives." Does this book, or practice, or person, encourage and help others to be the sort of person God expects Christians to be? Does it encourage love and faith, service and humility? Are the fruits of the Spirit of Christ in evidence? Jesus said we will know what is and is not of God by the fruit it produces. This guideline emphasizes that it is not only what is said that counts; it is also the effect those words produce in peoples' lives (see Matthew 7:15-23).

4. **Be wary of judging falsely.** If you still are not sure if something is of God, then refrain from assuming the seat of judgment. Over and over the New Testament warns us not to judge. That seat belongs to God alone and in such a case it is not our place to render a verdict. If you are unsure, don't participate. Anything that does not arise from faith is wrong. On the other hand, don't condemn the one who does choose to participate. Remember, the Lord is his judge. And who knows but that the matter in question may be the very vehicle God is using to complete His work in that brother's life.

On the other hand, if you are sure that you can acceptably participate in something, you still should be sensitive to your brother's doubts. Remember, no book, no activity is of greater value that your brother's soul.

The Scriptures contain an incident that is instructive in this matter. It seems that a group of men were preaching a message that appeared to be in conflict with accepted doctrine. After a short debate some influential leaders rushed to a judgment. They concluded that the men were guilty of heresy and they were ready to decree the death penalty. Just then a calming voice was raised. "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men… In the present case I advise you: leave these men alone! If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is of God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:35,38).

David Dailey preaches for the Greenwood church of Christ. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 623, Greenwood, SC 29646.

I Will Care

AMOS ALLEN

I have decided to care. It may not change the world, but I will care. I will not become cynical. I will not give up on people until God says to do so. I will love even when it hurts. I will give my time and energy and not consider it a waste when there are no visible results. I have decided to be like Jesus.

At times I will fail, but I will not remain on the path of self-preservation and self-indulgence. Rather, I choose to step back onto the path of concern for others. My joy will be found in serving others.

I want to be like Jesus. Therefore, I will resist what is not of God and embrace His Spirit. I will not trade heaven for hell.

> **"...I HAVE TRIED THE HALF–HEARTED APPROACH TO GOD, AND IT DOES NOT SATISFY."**

When I tire of people's worthless ways, I will remember that others cared enough to teach me. When Satan suggests that I am a fool, I will remind myself that he is a liar and not to be trusted. When I find myself filling up with disdain and disgust for people, I will wash their feet and show them honor.

As my heart is trained to care and be concerned, may it grow. I want my heart to be compassionate rather than contemptuous, caring rather than cold. I would that my heart be free to love. That it would be free of the fear of failure or looking foolish. That it would be free to try, to experiment, to try again, to be extravagant in service. I want to be free like Jesus.

If I offend, it is because I love deeply. If people think I am out of place, maybe it is because Jesus has taught me my place. My own discomfort will be confronted and overcome.

Is this extreme or fanatical or radical? Possibly. But I have tried the half-hearted approach to God and it does not satisfy. Surely there is something better.

What would a big–hearted, free–thinking, undistracted Christian look like? Like Jesus. What does extravagant love and grace–filled determination accomplish? The cross and our redemption. What does a dead–to–self and alive–to–God person do? He cares. Does anyone care? I do, and I suspect the same of you. Let's try; let's start taking chances. Let's see how big God can make our hearts!

Amos Allen can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

I Disagree!

STEPHEN J. MATHIS

Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained" (Philippians 3:15-16, NRSV).

In Philippians 4:2 Paul addresses a disagreement between two influential church members. In this key text he encourages Euodia and Syntyche to get along and to have the same mind. Now, I want you to stop and think for a minute. Do you know anyone who *always* agrees with you? I don't. So what does Paul mean by "be of the same mind?" Is he telling us to always agree with each other?

No. That's not it. Paul's point in Philippians is not that we always agree, but that we always have the same focus; that we have the same kind of mind — the mind (or attitude, as the NIV puts it) of Jesus Christ (see Philippians 2:5-11). Paul does not expect or command total agreement, but he does expect and command unity. You see, God expects for us to disagree. God created us as unique individuals who are drawn together to live as a new community; a new people. Our fellowship with one another does not depend on our ability to reach consensus on everything. Our fellowship depends on the blood of Christ and the grace of God.

So what happens when I don't agree with you? Well, that depends. When we disagree we have to decide what our focus is going to be. Am I going to focus on the differences and require you to agree with me before I accept you as a brother or sister? Or, will I focus on Christ, remembering that He died for me, and that He died for you? Will I remember that we have been redeemed by the same blood, that we are buried in the same baptism, and that my life belongs to God and to you?

That's the choice we have to make. Don't you agree?

Stephen Mathis and his wife, Beth, have just recently moved from Charlotte, NC, to Schenectady, NY. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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The Importance of Fellowship...

MARK HUDSON

Everyone acknowledges without question that fellowship within the church is a fundamental Biblical subject. Unfortunately, however, the importance and scope of genuine Christian fellowship are rarely realized in actual experience today. In Acts 2:42 fellowship is listed as a basic element of church life, "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." Thus, the early church was as devoted to the practice of fellowship as it was to preaching and communion.

"Part of the problem today may be that of perception and definition."

The importance of biblical fellowship can be further seen in that the apostle John stated that our fellowship is an inseparable element of our salvation. He wrote, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:6-7). Fellowship between Christians is not optional. Rather, it is by God's design; those who are saved by the blood of Christ are in fellowship with one another.

Part of the problem today may be that of perception and definition. In the minds of many, fellowship has been reduced to the idea of a common meal shared from time to time. "Having a fellowship" has become synonymous with "let's eat." While it is true that the first century church did fellowship through the sharing of meals (Acts 2:46), their fellowship included so much more than just eating together. In Scripture fellowship is also expressed in communion, giving, the sharing of material possessions, the meeting of needs, and mutual encouragement to faithfulness in the face of persecution. Fellowship was not a separate activity, but was instead a sense of sharing and community that permeated all of one's Christian life.

So, how important is it for us to reclaim biblical fellowship? Twenty years ago Dr. Francis Schaeffer observed, "Unless the church changes its form and gets back to community and the sharing of lives personally, the church is done." Bold words. James Hinkle and Tim Woodroof put it this way in their book *Among Friends*, "The time has come for the church to find herself once again. Somewhere along the way we have taken a wrong turn. In the press to clarify dogmas and enforce ethics and argue theology, we have overlooked something fundamental about ourselves. We are family, community, fellowship. Until we discover how to love each other, none of the rest really matters."

Congregations today will thrive only when true fellowship is practiced. The responsibility for building these relationships rests with each one of us. While congregations may organize activities and programs, real health will come as families and individuals practice hospitality and caring and develop strong relationships.

Mark Hudson preaches for the church on Whiskey Rd. in Aiken, SC. You can write to him at 1071 Kismet Dr., Aiken, SC 29803.

Brotherhood News

— Mike Mobley

WILMINGTON, NC...

A new chapter has begun in the history of the Pine Valley congregation in Wilmington. On August 17, 1997 the four shepherds—Jimmy Dickson, Floyd Kirby, Ira Kirkman and Larry Prewitt—commissioned two new ministers. *Kim Matthews*, the new pulpit minister, is a native of West Virginia and graduated in 1979 from the Sunset School of Preaching. He has worked with churches in both Griffithsville and Danville, West Virginia, and Woodsfield, Ohio. A gifted songwriter and singer, Kim has been a part of the singing group *Barnabas*. He and his wife, Brenda, have been married 24 years and have two married children who reside in West Virginia. *Al Dunkelman*, the new youth minister, comes to Pine Valley after a ten year ministry in Bristol, Virginia. Al and his wife, Karen, have a son named Joseph. Al brings wisdom and experience to his position as well as a dynamic song leading ability. The family at Pine Valley is excited about the potential for reaching the lost in the growing Wilmington area. The Pine Valley church facility is located at 3601 South College Rd., Wilmington, NC 28409. The phone number is (910) 791-2255.

RALEIGH, NC...

Ross Thomson, who has preached for and ministered to the Brooks Ave. church for the past six years, has accepted an invitation to work with the Northlake church of Christ in Atlanta, Georgia. In a statement to the church brother Thomson said, "I believe that God led Christine and me to Brooks Ave. for our benefit. If I had my life to live over, I would come here again." The elders issued this response to brother Thomson's decision, "With a sense of reluctance and sadness the elders have accepted Ross' resignation...We have been praying for Ross and his family, asking God to bless them...We're pleased that they are going to be a part of a fine church family at Northlake in Atlanta."

CHARLOTTE, NC...

The annual Church Leadership Seminar at Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center will be conducted January 16-17, 1998. The speaker will be Dr. Jack Reese and the theme will be "Heirs of the Past, Guardians of the Future: Leadership Lessons from 2 Timothy."

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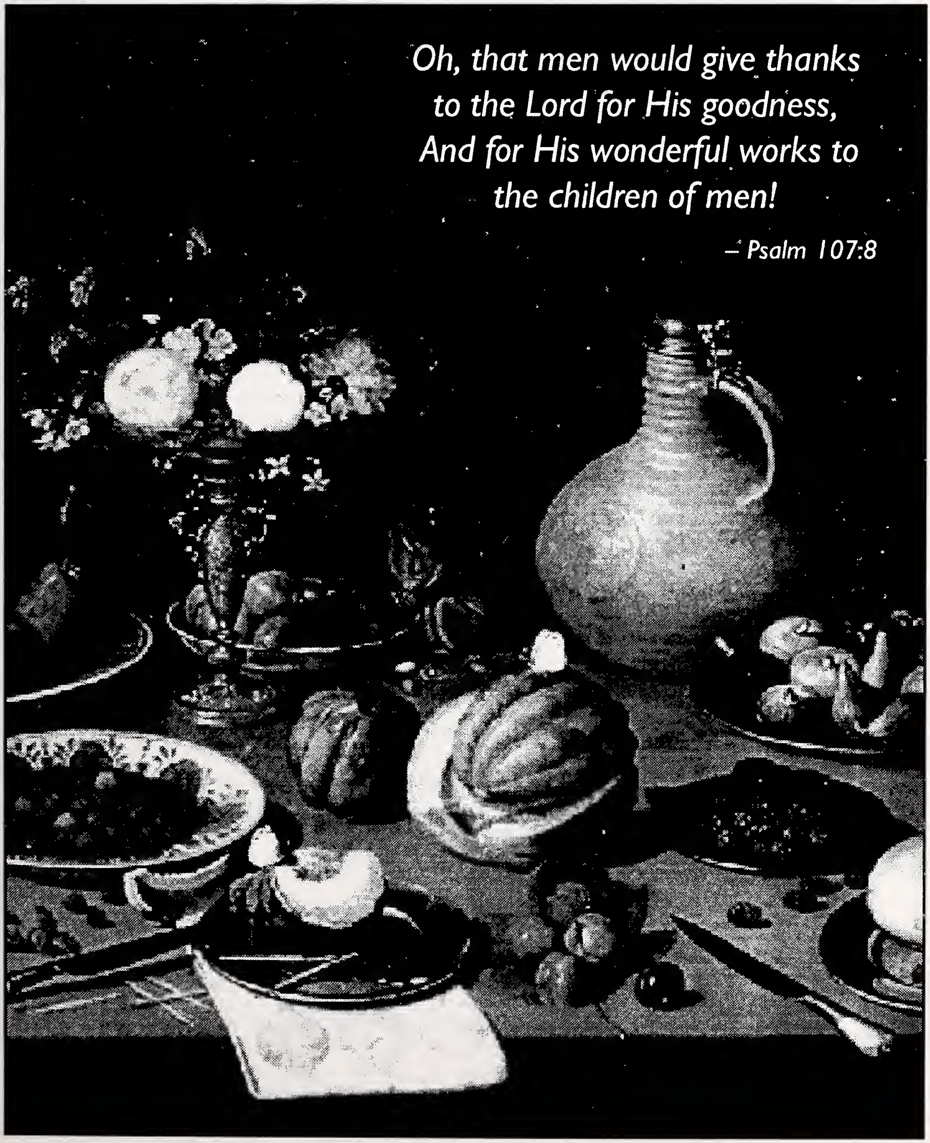

Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men!

– Psalm 107:8

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That People Would Thank Him

Dennis Conner

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever...Oh, that men would gives thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing...Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders" (Psalm 107:1, 21-22, 32).

Those first Pilgrims came to our shores for a number of reasons. For some it was the opportunity for new markets and wealth. For others it was simply the hope of starting over in a new life. And then there were those who were lured to the shores of the new land called America by the promise of religious freedom. Whatever their reasons were for coming, they soon found life in the new land to be hard. They managed to plant and then harvest their crops, meager as they were. Soon afterward they came together and shared a simple, common meal for the purpose of offering their heartfelt thanks to God. They saw the hand of God in their new found freedom and opportunities, and thus felt compelled to give thanks. And that, as every American school child knows, is the history of our modern holiday tradition called Thanksgiving.

For many Americans, however, it is ironic that very little giving of thanks goes on during the very day set aside for that purpose. For too many the day is not about gratitude, but self–gratification as they gorge on turkey and all the trimmings and then settle in for an afternoon of leisure. For them Thanksgiving is simply a day to be enjoyed, not a feeling to be expressed. It is something akin to chasing after the wind to suggest that as a nation we need to remember the great Giver of all our national blessings. We are a forgetful nation, surrendering to the delusion that we have made ourselves what we are and are to be congratulated, rather than grateful.

And sometimes the people of God can be just as forgetful. We can easily forget what great things God has done for us. Forget that He is still powerful and in control. Forget that we are wholly dependent upon Him. And forget the sheer awesomeness of our very redemption. Time and again in Psalm 107 the author implores, "Oh, that men would gives thanks to the LORD..." Of all people, the church today cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to that cry.

Today the same God is still at work for the good of His children. And what is our response to that work? The psalmist's call is for a heartfelt outpouring of thanks and gratitude in response to God's activity in behalf of His people. And what forms of expression do we give to that response? In this text the poet offers some suggestions.

First, the people are called upon to offer up sacrifices of thanksgiving. They are called upon to bring their gifts as thank offerings to the Lord as an expression of their gratitude. We tend to think of expressions of thanksgiving primarily in terms of words, but the concern here is that there not only be words of thanks expressed, but acts as well. What might that mean for the Christian? It means that we offer to God the thanksgiving sacrifices of worship, time, compassion extended to others, the melody of song–filled hearts, and much more.

Second, they are called upon to proclaim what God has done. The works of God are worth telling about! The truly grateful soul cannot keep to himself the news of what

Editorial continued:

God has done. Silence is often the evidence of ingratitude.

And declaration of what God has done is to be accompanied with rejoicing. Psalm 107 is filled with a litany of the great works of God in the world and among His people, works that attest to His awesomeness and sovereignty and that elicit outbursts of joyful singing! Sacrifices offered without the proper spirit are reduced to mere ritual. What is the spirit that pervades our own sacrifices to God? Are we excited by what God has done in the world, in the church, and in our lives? Does the awesomeness of the Lord leave us giddy with joy? And do we feel compelled to tell people about it?

Then finally, they are called upon to worship. Worship is the most natural context of all for the expression of our thanks to the Father. Let the gathered people lift high the name of the holy and majestic God who has done such marvelous things! Let the praises flow! Yes, let the expression of thanks in worship move us beyond ourselves. Let it point our eyes and hearts upward to the Most High God who alone is good.

At this season of Thanksgiving, may we all pause and take time to truly reflect on all that the Lord has done, and be reminded of our absolute dependence upon His lovingkindness. Indeed, may life itself become for us an unending season of thankfulness.

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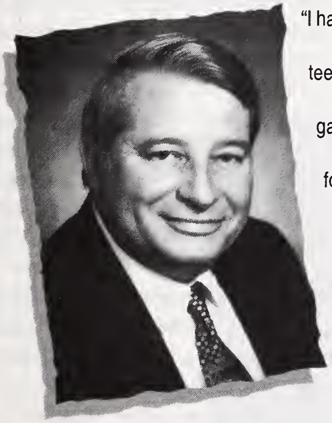

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Associate Editorial:

The Image of God

JIM MULLICAN

Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created man in His own image. Some have mistakenly taken this to mean that God has arms, legs, a nose, etc., but Jesus said in John 4:24 that "God is a spirit." However, it may be that in some way our bodies and our senses correspond to some of God's abilities. To suggest more than that would be to venture into the realm of guesswork, although I must confess I have been known to do that on occasion.

It appears that man is created in the image of God in several respects. Such as: (1) He was given dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:26) as God has dominion over the universe. (2) He has the ability to distinguish right from wrong (moral consciousness), but unlike God, man does not always choose to do right (Genesis 18:25). (3) He has been endowed with creative ability (Genesis 4:22). Man paints, builds, invents, and designs what he needs or wants. (4) Like God, man has an appreciation for beauty. Man creates works of art on canvas or carves them out of stone. In this beautiful season of the year, as we lift up our eyes to the mountains and scenes around us, we should be impressed with God's appreciation of beauty. (5) Like God, man is a relational being benefitting from companionship and love (Genesis 2:18). He was created by God for the very purpose of enjoying love and fellowship with God. (6) Man is created to live forever, like God (Ecclesiastes 12:7; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10). Since this is true, we are responsible for choosing where we will spend eternity—in heaven or hell—and preparing ourselves now so that we will be the kind of people who belong there.

Let us ever strive to be able to say with Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another." For our lives to be shaped into the image of the Lord requires radical surgery, but we will never regret it. Paul further exhorts in Colossians 3:5-6, "Put to death therefore what isearthly in you; fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these things the wrath of God is coming." Let us make the changes necessary in order to truly reflect His image.

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Thanksgiving: Praise and Service

Johnny Melton

In 1961 A. W. Tozer declared, "Worship is the missing jewel" of the modern church. His observation was exactly on target, but back then his was a lone voice that went largely unheeded on this subject.

During the fifties and sixties there was much growth and expansion of congregations, and consequently much attention was given to growing the church and being the church, but in far too many instances God was not invited along for the journey. Oh, to be sure, we thought that He understood that it was all right for Him to join us for the ride, but we didn't really focus our attention on Him.

> "THANKFULNESS IN THE MIDST OF LIFE GOES HAND IN HAND WITH WORSHIP."

In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in worship that has impacted many churches. With the change in focus has come a change in style. While some changes in style are not edifying in themselves, and some are, in fact, de–edifying, the change in focus has been largely welcomed. Worship is now being focused more and more on God and it is praise–oriented, rather then being addressed to fellow worshipers with God simply looking in on the procedure.

Praise–oriented worship is at the heart of Thanksgiving. "Gratitude" is from the same root word as the word "grace." A person who has begun to accept how gracious God is to us becomes a grateful person. "Thanksgiving" is from the root word "think." So, to think about life accurately is to thank God continually in the midst of life.

In Deuteronomy 8:10 scripture reads, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you." Almost every line in Psalm 100 contains worship language: "Shout for joy to the LORD...Worship the LORD with gladness... come before him with joyful songs...Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise...Give thanks to him and praise his name." The common thread that runs through these texts is worship.

From Luke 17:15-16, 18 we take this reading, "One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan... was no one found to return and give praise

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to God except this foreigner?" And then from the Epistles, "Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (I Thessalonians 5:17-18). Thankfulness in the midst of life goes hand in hand with worship.

An old hymn expresses that truth this way:

Thanks to God for my Redeemer,
Thanks for all thou dost provide,
Thanks for times now but a memory,
Thanks for Jesus by my side.

Thanks for pleasant, balmy springtime,
Thanks for dark and dreary fall.
Thanks for tears by now forgotten,
Thanks for peace within my soul.

Thanks for prayers that thou has answered,
Thanks for what thou dost deny.
Thanks for storms that I have weathered,
Thanks for all thou dost supply.

Thanks for pain; thanks for pleasure,
Thanks for comfort in despair,
Thanks for grace that none can measure,
Thanks for love beyond compare.

Yes, thanksgiving calls us to worship and praise, but is also calls us to thanks*living*. Have you noticed in some churches an inscription somewhere that reads, "Enter to worship, depart to serve"? Some have taken exception to that. They say, "Worship is service. After all, we do have 'worship services,' don't we?"

But service is also worship, isn't it? "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). Isn't a cup of water offered in the name of Jesus a means of worship (Mark 9:41)?

The sacrifice of thanksgiving means that I offer myself in a new and deeper way to God. That's the supreme act of thanksgiving—or, thanksliving. Paul Rees calls it "living the doxology of life." I like that.

It isn't always easy to practice thanksliving. In 1636 during the Thirty Years War—one of the worst wars in history in terms of deaths, epidemics, and economic results—there was a godly preacher whose name was Martin Rinkert. In a single year, he buried 5,000 people in his parish, or about 15 a day. He lived with the worst that life could dish out.

But during that time he wrote a table prayer for his children that is now a favorite Thanksgiving hymn: *"Now thank we all our God / With hearts and hands and voices, / Who wondrous things has done, / In whom this world rejoices."* If I had to spend the year holding 5,000 funerals, could I write for my children a song of thanksgiving? It's an unusual thing that in the history of the world many who seemingly have the least to thank God about thank Him the most.

Consider the case of Matthew Henry,

whose commentary on the entire Bible has become a classic. On one occasion he was robbed. Following the incident he wrote in his diary, "Let me be thankful. First, I was never robbed before. Second, although they took my purse, they did not take my life. Third, although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, let me be thankful that it was I who was robbed, and not who robbed."

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom tells about an incident that taught her the principle of giving thanks in all things. During WWII Corrie and her sister, Betsy, had been harboring Jews in their home, so they were arrested and imprisoned at Ravensbruck Camp. The barracks was extremely crowded and infested with fleas. One morning they read in their tattered Bible from I Thessalonians five the reminder to rejoice in all things. Betsy said, "Corrie, we've got to give thanks for this barracks and even for these fleas." Corrie replied, "No way am I going to thank God for fleas." But Betsy was persuasive and they did thank God even for the fleas. During the months that followed, they found that their barracks was left relatively free, and they could do Bible study, talk openly, and even pray in the barracks. It was their only place of refuge. Several months later they learned that the reason the guards seldom entered their barracks was because of their fear of those fleas!

Indeed, thanks*living* calls us to worship God and to serve others undaunted by whatever circumstances we experience.

Walter Brueggemann has written, "Praise is the duty and delight, the ultimate vocation of the human community: indeed, of all creation. Yes, all of life is aimed toward God and finally exists for the sake of God. Praise articulates and embodies our capacity to yield, submit, and abandon ourselves in trust and gratitude to the One whose we are. Praise is not only a human requirement and a human need. It is also a human delight. We have a resident hunger to move beyond self, to return our energy and worth to the One from whom it has been granted. In our return to that One, we find our deepest joy."

During this Thanksgiving season, as in every season, and in all circumstances, may we worship God, giving Him thanks and serving in His name and to His glory. Amen.

Johnny Melton is a former editor of ***Carolina Christian*** *and preaches for the Old Aberdeen church of Christ in West Point, MS. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 651, West Point, MS 39773-0651.*

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Giving Thanks to Our Provider

Stephen J. Mathis

Everyone has their favorite time of year. Some people look forward to Spring, to the blooming flowers and newness of life. Maybe you look forward to the first snow, or the last day of Summer, or the end of Daylight Saving Time. Most school age kids look forward to the end of school and the freedom of summer (and their parents look forward to September!). Anniversaries. Birthdays. Vacation. For whatever reason, each of us has that special time, or day, or season.

> "It has always been a special time to soak in the blessing of family, the joy of life, and the peace of the Lord."

I look forward to November. Growing up in New England, this was the first month of consistent snowfall (I have had many "white Halloweens"). The days are shorter. The hectic pace seems to slow down. The smells of hot chocolate and apple pie fill the house.

And most important, it's the time of Thanksgiving, my favorite holiday. Like everyone else, I love the food and I enjoy watching the Cowboys play. But there's more to it than that.

Thanksgiving in on a lower key than Christmas. My time is spent in reflection, rather than anticipation and wrapping paper. It has always been a special time to soak in the blessing of family, the joy of love, and the peace of the Lord.

My wife and I began a holiday tradition a few years ago. On the top of a piece of colored construction paper, using a crayon, we write, "Dear God, we are thankful for..." We leave the crayons nearby and list the many, many things God has blessed us with, in no particular order whatsoever. We add more sheets as necessary. The list stays up as a reminder of God's love and blessings. As I count my blessings, one by one, I am once again surprised by the all surpassing—and all consuming—love of God. All that I have He has given. All that I am He has made.

God has blessed us so richly. And He blesses us continually. Who else could give us color? Who else could give us such abundant life? I love Thanksgiving because it reminds me of the Giver. It is this time of year, this season of devotion, this holy day of thanks, that renews my spirit of gratitude.

And I just have to say "Thank You."
"We give thanks to you, O God,
We give thanks for your Name is near;
men tell of your wonderful deeds."
(Psalm 75:1)

Stephen J. Mathis, formerly of Charlotte, NC, can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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The God of Opposites

Amos Allen

Day and night. Winter and summer. Young and old. Days, seasons and people experience a wide range of variations. There may be several reasons why, but I will suggest just one: to teach us something about the nature of God.

Before getting into that, let's be reminded of how much we like having these opposites in our lives. We get excited watching the sun come up, but we also enjoy its retreat. We like to work, and to rest. Spring green is matched in beauty only by autumn orange. Going swimming in the summer and a hot shower in the winter are wonderful pleasures.

"Can it be that the winners are the losers and the dead are the only ones living?"

God created these contrasts because (I think) they reflect His nature. He is diverse, therefore what He has created is diverse. Some creatures fly, others crawl. Some run while others swim. Some are fast, but not all. Some are aggressive and some are passive. They live in places high and low, warm and cold, dry and wet, simple and complex. No one description adequately captures the nature of all.

In much the same way, no one description adequately captures the nature of God. He is the Creator who destroys. He is the Lover and also the Judge. God is the beginning and the end of all things. He is quick to act, yet amazingly slow (by our standards). Near, yet far. Gentle, yet terrible. Ancient of Days, yet an infant. King, yet Suffering Servant. Lamb, yet Lion. He might be one more than the other, but that is hard to determine.

The contrast I am trying to understand these days is the one about life and death. Jesus came that we might have life, yet He constantly invites us to die. I read that they are related to one another (Luke 9:23-26), but this is hard. Is it true I must give? Can it be that the winners are the losers and the dead are the only ones living?

I am inclined to take care of myself. I avoid pain and I seek food, rest and pleasure. Self–preservation is obviously good until we allow it to get out of hand. For instance, complete avoidance of all physical or emotional pain is counter–productive; surely the needle prick is preferred to the disease. It would seem that learning how to die to that which will destroy us is a good way to live. If we could recognize attitudes and behaviors that will either empower or cripple us, and choose appropriately, we would be a lot like Jesus of Nazareth. If it were possible to stop myself from doing what is foolish, I might discover how to live a life that counts for something. The time Jesus spent talking and listening to God seemed to help Him know what to deny Himself and what to engage in. His dependence upon God kept Him focused. Has anyone ever lived more fully than Jesus did? Knowing how to die was a major characteristic of a life that made an inestimable difference. Dying to self makes life good and worthwhile.

The Living God is well acquainted with death and recommends that we die on a regular basis. It's the only way to live!

Amos Allen preaches for the Meadowbrook Rd. church in Asheboro, NC. He can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

the eXpress Files:
A Column For Youth
Jesus Is Lord?

Danny Boggs

Kevin Garnett, a native of South Carolina who is barely out of his teens, will make an eye-popping $125 million over the next seven years playing basket ball for the Minnesota Timberwolves. Don't bother to plug your eyes back into their sockets yet. American teens will themselves spend $20 billion this year! Kevin Garnett would have to live to be the Methuselah of professional basketball to total $20 billion!

Americans aged 12-19 have an average of $50 per week to spend in any way they want. If you had Kevin's average of more than $400,000 per week, how would you spend it? You'd probably do more of the same things you do now with your $20, $50, or $100 share of the American teen fortune.

Jesus is Lord is one of our favorite songs to sing when worshiping with others, as well it should be! It says that Jesus is "Lord," powerful and in charge. He is my "Redeemer"; he bought me out of sin with His own blood. "How He loves me, " without a doubt.

How often have the words "Jesus is Lord" run through your mind or across your lips when you were being handed your allowance, your paycheck, or your birthday money? Do you stop to think, "Jesus is Lord" when the collection is being taken on Sunday, or when you learn of someone's need through the week? If Jesus isn't Lord of our wallet, you haven't made Him you Lord at all.

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and dust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). He continued, "No man can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus later met a young man who, like us, was rich. He seemed to love God. He tried to obey all the commandments. But Jesus said that if he wanted eternal life he needed to go sell his possessions and give to the poor. "And you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Instead of following Jesus, however, the young man listened to the master in his wallet and walked away disappointed.

The song *Jesus Is Lord* continues, "How I love Him." If Jesus is really our Lord, making Him Lord of our wallets is not a matter of guilt, but a response of sincere love to the God who gives us

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every good thing. When Paul wanted to encourage the Corinthians to be loving and generous,he wrote, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also real generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”
(2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

Is Jesus the Lord of everything in your life, including your wallet?

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28739.

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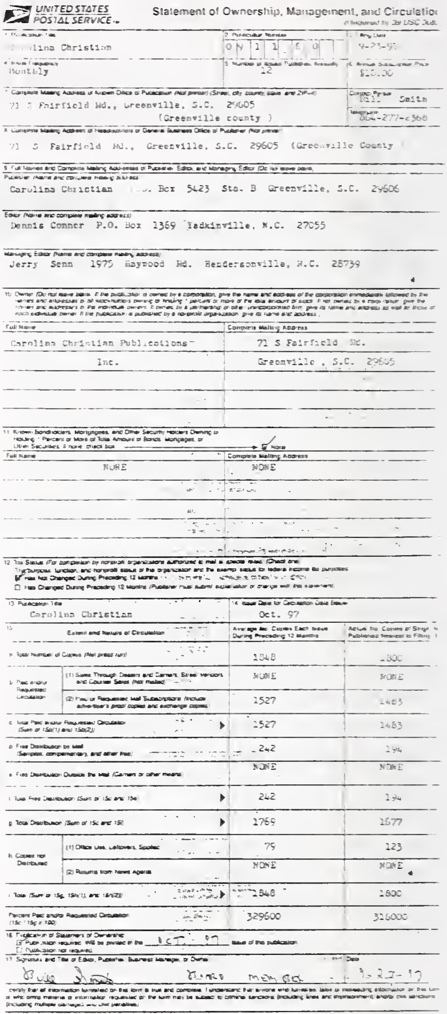

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Forgiveness and Health

Bobby Wade

"Unforgiving—unforgiven!" That's the awful verdict of Jesus' words. As he said, "You must truly forgive your brother or sister, or my heavenly Father will not forgive you" (Matthew 18:35, *Easy–to–Read Version*).

"FORGIVENESS IS BOTH A DECISION AND A PROCESS."

When we are the offenders, we must obviously make amends. When someone has done something to injure or hurt us, we are commanded to forgive. Not only is this a spiritual necessity, as Matthew 18:35 indicates, but it is also a requirement for our physical and emotional well–being. The noxious weed of bitterness will spring up in the garden of the unforgiving heart and crowd out the tender plants of peace, joy and happiness. So, we practice forgiveness out of a sense of self–interest as well as out of a desire to do God's will. It is in the doing of His will that we find our own healing.

Some of Christ's disciples were quite legalistic about the concept of forgiveness. "How many times must I forgive someone?" Peter asked. "Seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). Jesus replied that they, and we, must forgive as often as a person requests. "If your brother wrongs you, tell him and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3, paraphrased).

While our ability to forgive completely is dependent upon another's disposition to change, our *willingness* to forgive certainly is not. Consider God's forgiveness of us as a model. We must obey the conditions of pardon; forgiveness is conditional. However, God's willingness to forgive is ever present. He doesn't hate us. Rather, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). There's nothing in the scriptures or common sense which indicates that we can go around holding resentments, hating, allowing ourselves to be full of rage, and not suffer for it. Such things will simply eat us up!

Forgiveness is both a *decision* and a *process*. We decide at a given moment to forgive, and then we allow ourselves to grieve. You may be familiar with what are often referred to as the stages of grief: shock, denial, anger, depression, bargaining and finally, acceptance. It's OK to remember! But when we remember the offense, keep in mind also that we have made the difficult but Godly decision to forgive. The statement, "If you don't forget, then you haven't forgiven" is neither possible nor true. It's all right to feel certain emotions, even anger, as we work through the grief process when others have wronged us. Otherwise, we may never reach the point of acceptance, which in turn leads to complete forgiveness.

How do we know when we have truly forgiven another? When we no longer feel anger or hurt? No. When we no longer think about it? No. Then when? When we treat the person as if the offense had never occurred!

"God, help me to forgive others their trespasses. You have forgiven me of so much!"

Bobby Wade is a preacher and certified counselor. He can be contacted at 925 South County Rd. and 400 W, Rockport, IN 47635.

Shot From Behind

MARK HUDSON

I recently made my first trip to Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. The tour made history come alive for us, and our guide made a comment that I will never forget. Fort Sumter was one of four Federal installations around Charleston Harbor when South Carolina seceded from the Union. Three forts were abandoned by the North and the Federal troops were then consolidated at Sumter. The first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Sumter by Confederate troops using the abandoned fortifications! Our tour guide observed that Sumter fell in 1861 because "it was not designed to withstand shelling from the rear." Sumter was designed with the perceived threat coming from the ocean and the channel. It fell because the real threat came from shore batteries originally intended to work in concert to provide a united defense.

"Let us remember that our enemy is Satan, not one another."

The Park Ranger's words struck home. I thought about the similarities between the fallen Sumter and wounded Christians. We have a real enemy, and his name is Satan. Oftentimes, instead of the perceived full frontal assault, Satan uses those who should be in concert with us to shell us from the rear. Unfortunately, Christians are often attacked from behind by the words and actions of other Christians.

Words can take deadly aim at the hearts of others. Gossip and criticism easily destroy. In contrast, Paul instructs,

> *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for the edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear"* (Ephesians 4:29).

We can also destroy our fellow Christians through discouragement. Deuteronomy 1:28 tells how the hearts of the children of Israel melted because of the bad report of the spies. Negativism spreads discouragement like wild fire. Numbers 32:6-7 tells of another occasion when some discouraged their brethren. The tribes of Reuben and Gad refused to cross the Jordan to fight with and for their brothers. Moses asked, *"Now why are you discouraging the sons of Israel?"* Our refusal to share in a good work destroys others.

Let us remember that our enemy is Satan, not one another. Determine to speak only words that build up. Do not discourage the brethren through negativism or an unwilling spirit. Let's turn our guns on Satan, not one another.

Mark Hudson, who preaches for the church on Whiskey Rd. in Aiken, SC, can be contacted at 1071 Kismet Dr. in Aiken, 29803.

Watch Your Life

Peter Rode

In *The Spring of Contemplation* Thomas Merton writes, "People don't want to hear any more words. In our mechanical age, all words have become alike...To say 'God is love'is like saying 'Eat Wheaties. ' " Because there is so much noise and busyness in peoples' lives, they need to see a display of Christianity in our lives if they are going to hear us when we try to point them to Christ. Mother Teresa is a good example of what I'm talking about. People around the world listened to her — people from all walks of life — because she practiced her faith in her daily life.

When Jesus was on earth, he not only taught the principles of Christianity, but He practiced them for all to see. He was with the twelve for over three years and He shared all aspects of His life with them. He did this so that they could understand how to apply the principles He taught to daily life. Christianity is a practical religion that allows us to live in a peaceful relationship with God and with our neighbors. We cannot claim to be Christians if we do not exhibit Christianity in our lives. This is why Paul urged the Ephesian disciples to "live lives worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1), and why Peter urged his readers to "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us" (1 Peter 2:12).

The spiritual journey that we started when we were united with Christ in baptism leads us to "be conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Romans 8:29). Each day, therefore, we need to do three things:

1. **Pray to God** that He will help us become more Christlike in all our words and deeds. We have not, nor will we ever, reach the stage where we can say that there is no room for growth. It is only with the help of God's Spirit that we can become more and more like Jesus.

2. **Submit to God** so that He can mold us in His image. So often we ask God for something and then proceed to take it back and attempt to do things by ourselves. We are like children who want to do things beyond our capability, only to become very frustrated, even give up, when things don't work out.

3. **Have the desire to change.** Paul told the Colossians to "put to death... whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (Colossians 3:5). We can recognize sins such as sexual immorality, impurity, lust, etc., but we often don't even blink or recognize the fact that we condone and practice sins such as greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, the use of filthy language, and lying to each other (Colossians 3:5-9).

I urge all of us to rise to the challenge of trying to follow Jesus more closely so that "whatever you do, in word or deed, (you) do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can and contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Who Dares to Listen?

TIM SENSING

Cause and effect. Every action produces a result. Sometimes, however, there is a break down. Sometimes the action does not produce the desired result.

What about preaching the Word of God? Does preaching always produce the desired effect? The question was asked by Karl Barth, "Who dares to preach?" What about the antithesis to that question? We could just as well ask, "Who dares to listen?" The Word of God proclaimed has power. Romans 10:17 affirms this, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." And so does Hebrews 4:12, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double–edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow..." Does preaching (the cause) still have God's desired effect in peoples' lives? How do we explain that even the best sermons proclaimed by the best preachers are slept through week after week? You see, it is not just the boring sermons that are not listened to!

We should be reminded that ***the Word of God is the deed of God.*** "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth...For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Psalm 33: 6, 9). God's Word has power. In a society where talk is cheap, promises are empty, and rhetoric is synonymous with vanity, preaching has fallen on hard times. Preaching is not just a speech. Preaching is not idle chatter. Preaching is not trading religious ideas about God with the audience. Preaching is the proclamation of the gospel.

DOES PREACHING (THE CAUSE) STILL HAVE GOD'S DESIRED EFFECT IN PEOPLES' LIVES?

Who dares to preach? What audacity! Yet the calling remains. The prophet Amos challenged, "The lion has roared — who will not fear (*dare to listen, TS*)? The Sovereign Lord has spoken — who can but prophesy (*dare to preach*)?" Hear, then, the Word of the Lord.

Who dares to preach, we ask? And let us also ask — who dares to listen? Do any of us listen to preaching anymore? Is not the message urgent? Does the messenger himself know the urgency of the message? Or is the messenger asleep at the wheel?

The preached Word of God is the Word of God! The preached word has power. God has spoken and continues to speak. Words give live, arouse jealousy, provoke anger, bring peace, etc. Preaching is not merely a word *about* God and His redemptive acts; rather, it is a word *of* God and as such is itself a redemptive event (Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...").

The preached Word is a redemptive word. The preached word is a challenging word. The preached Word is a

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

LUBBOCK, TX...
Tim Brumfield of Sunset International Bible Institute has announced the formation of a Sudanese team to reach the Sudanese refugees now living in Ethiopia and Uganda. They will also prepare to enter Sudan when entry becomes feasible. The team members are Sudanese nationals who have trained at SIBI; Isaya Jackson, Costa Costa and John Kosoba.

NASHVILLE, TN...
2,500 friends, alumni, students and faculty of Lipscomb University witnessed the recent inaugural of **Stephen F. Flatt** as the university's 16th president. Flatt, a Lipscomb alumnus himself, succeeds Harold Hazelip, who had retired.

YADKINVILLE, NC...
The 12th annual Small Church Workshop, hosted by the Yadkinville church of Christ, will be conducted May 14-15, 1998. The theme for the workshop will be "Prescriptions For Church Health."

CHARLOTTE, NC...
The 5th annual Church Leadership Seminar at Carolina Bible Camp and Retreat Center in Mocksville, NC, will be conducted January 16-17, 1998. The speaker will be Dr. Jack Reese and the theme will be "Heirs of the Past, Guardians of the Future: Leadership Lessons from 2 Timothy." For more information contact the office of the Providence Rd. church of Christ at (704) 364-0478.

---

comforting word. The preached Word is a corrective word. And the preached Word is a powerful word.

WAKE UP! Hear the Word of the Lord.

"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins." Not only must the world hear the Word of the Lord, but so must the church. Privilege involves responsibility and accountability. The trumpet of God's Word is sounded on every page of Scripture. God's Word is also sounded every time the Scripture is proclaimed in your hearing. The preached Word is the Word of God.

Hear, then, the Word of God.

Tim Sensing serves the Lexington church of Christ and can be contacted at 649 Barr Rd., Lexington, SC 29072.

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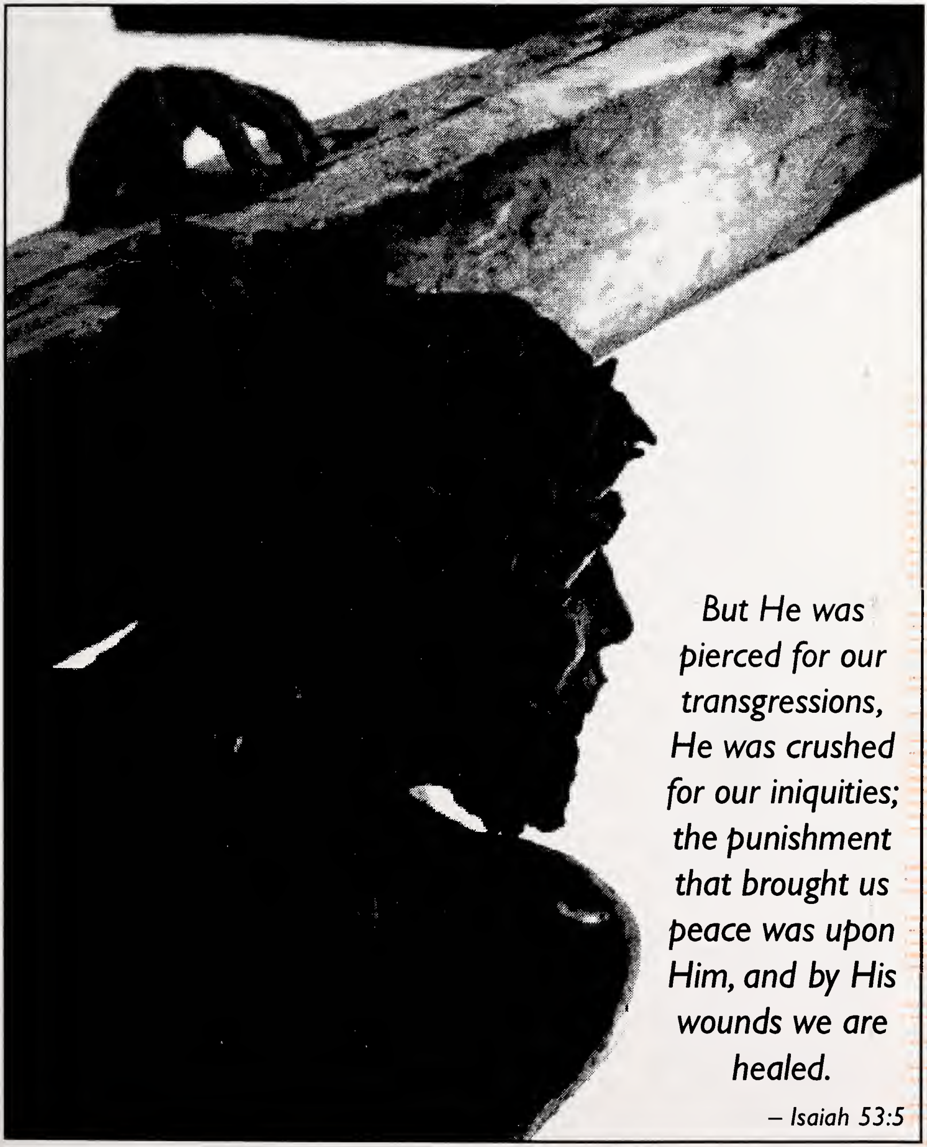

But He was
pierced for our
transgressions,
He was crushed
for our iniquities;
the punishment
that brought us
peace was upon
Him, and by His
wounds we are
healed.

– Isaiah 53:5

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Sources of Power

Dennis Conner

Jesus had said, "...I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Following the death of Stephen (recorded in Acts 6:8-7:60), furious and deadly opposition was unleashed against the Jerusalem church. Satanic forces of hatred and false religion were brought to bear against the young church, but Christ proved to be true to His word. Just as the persecution began to spread beyond the walled city of Jerusalem, Christ Himself encountered one of the chief agents of that persecution who had also consented fully to the murder of Stephen—Saul. In a remarkable display of God's grace, Saul was reclaimed from the dark side and Satan's henchman became God's chosen vessel. With the conversion of Saul, the persecution soon abated and for a while "the churches...had peace".

While it may have been a time of peace for the churches, it was not a time of complacency and passivity (which are often the by–products of peacefulness). As Warren Wiersbe has observed, "They seized the opportunity to repair and strengthen their sails before the next storm began to blow." Luke's commentary of the church during that time provides a helpful glimpse into the character and power of the early church: "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31). His observation inevitably invites comparisons with the church today in various places.

Before we make any comparisons, let's spend a moment looking at the character of those early churches.

The first thing we note is that during this time of peace the churches *were edified.* That is, they were built up. This inward strengthening was no doubt affected by their rootedness in Scripture, the vitality of their worship, the depth of their fellowship, and their dependency upon God in prayer (Acts 2:42). By nurturing themselves on these fundamental elements of congregational life, adversity then had the effect of making the churches stronger, rather than weakening them.

The congregational life of the churches was further characterized by *godliness.* They walked "in the fear of the Lord." There was a profound sense of, and reverence for, the presence of God in their midst. The church dared not do anything that would displease Him. Instead, their daily life was an active pursuit of that which pleased God. There was, then, a sensitivity toward God that is sorely lacking in many modern churches. Many churches today have persuaded themselves that God does not take too seriously their worldliness and lack of commitment. Too many today simply do not take God seriously enough.

A third quality of these churches is that they were *blessed by the Holy Spirit.* They not only walked in the fear of the Lord, but also "in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." Luke here refers to the Spirit's aid and encouragement. Rather than listen to the spirit of the world, the church sought instead the encouraging presence and guidance of the Spirit of God. They acknowledged the active role of the Spirit in the life of the church and were comforted by it.

Fourth, *the churches grew.* As Luke puts it, they "were multiplied." The growth was directly related to the other characteristics. Walking in godliness and being comforted by the Holy Spirit, the church grew. Growth was the consequence, the natural by–product, of the spiritual life of the churches.

The value of this text for the church today is that it points us to the sources of power in the church. Respected commentator R. C. H. Lenski concluded from this text that "When the members walk with the fear of the Lord before their eyes and the Spirit's encouraging voice in their hearts, the church will be strong and will surely multiply." His observation is on target.

This text raises some interesting, provocative, and perhaps even uncomfortable questions for us today.

For instance, is there a genuine inward strengthening going on in Christians and churches, or are we content with the shallowness of outward ritual? How strong is the inward congregational life?

And how is our walk with God? Is there a real sense of God's presence in our assemblies? In our lives? Do we rationalize sin and complacency, or do we instead find contriteness and brokenness in our hearts as we live in the presence of the holy God?

Do we allow the encouraging presence of the Holy Spirit in our churches and in our lives? For many of us the Holy Spirit is *persona non grata*. He is the family member that everybody knows about, but nobody talks about. All rhetoric to the contrary, the Holy Spirit in the minds of many is relegated to little more than the impersonal "Force" of Star Wars. We must understand that we do not necessarily invite irrational, "charismatic" extremes into the church by simply acknowledging the Spirit's ongoing presence and power to comfort.

Thus, what are the sources of power in the church today? Too often we draw upon the shallow power of methodologies, programs and human ingenuity instead of the deeper and abiding power of God. While methods and creativity are useful tools, they are no substitute for the divine power that is made available to us by God. The church today must seek to nurture an authentic spirituality that consists of inward strength, godly and reverent lives that are lived in the genuine awareness of the presence of God, and the comfort that comes from the encouraging presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Then the churches will be multiplied.

Directory of Churches in the Carolinas Now Available

After several unanticipated delays, the 1998 Directory of Churches of Christ in the Carolinas is ready. For your copy (or copies) call our Managing Editor, Jerry Senn, at (704) 692-0306. Or you can order the directories from Carolina Christian Books and Gifts by calling 1-800-343-1081. We are indebted to Ron Newberry and many of the members of the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ in Greensboro, NC for doing all the work on the 1998 edition of the directory. There will be some inaccuracies (due to ongoing changes in congregations, unreturned information surveys, and normal human error), but efforts have been taken to make the directory as accurate and helpful as possible. We appreciate your patience and support!

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Friends

Jim Mullican

Some of the problems we have in life result from our attempts to be self–sufficient. We don't want to depend on anyone else, and we especially don't want others to know us too well. We may remember the old adage, "Familiarity breeds contempt." Perhaps we fear that if others know us as we really are, they wouldn't like us. After all, sometimes we have thoughts and feelings of which we are ashamed. This brings to mind two points.

First, we should remember that God loves us in spite of our faults and imperfections. "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus has been here Himself. He knows what it's like to be human. "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16). Jesus knows us better than anyone does, and He still loves us!

Second, as Christians we are to be like God in this characteristic of understanding love. John wrote, "We love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The apostle also concluded his third letter by saying, "Peace be with you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them" (3 John 15). Christians are to be the best of friends to each other. Those known as Quakers refer to themselves as "the Society of Friends." The proper response when a Christian sins should not be outrage and calls for the immediate withdrawal of fellowship, but an extended hand to help, a sympathetic ear to listen, and a loving heart to encourage and pray. As Paul said, " carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Many leave the church because they feel that "Everyone else is righteous, but me. I don't belong here." Actually, quite the opposite is true. Jesus didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). Considering the raw material we give Him to work with, we should not be surprised if it takes a while for Him to transform us.

Meanwhile, let's lean on our friends for support and take advantage of the strength and encouragement we can draw from one another. Never underestimate the awesome power of a listening ear.

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The Character of God's Love

MIKE MOBLEY

The fullness of God is beyond our comprehension and description. His character is absolute and pure; there is nothing in this world that compares to Him and there is no one who is His equal. God is both just and merciful, love and hate, sovereign majesty and humble servant, compassion and vengeance, truth and power. And God is all this without flaw or fault because He is pure righteousness and holiness. However, the one aspect of God that we seem to cherish the most is the character of God's amazing and wonderful love.

Jesus, God's only begotten Son, was sent to live among us in order to show us that God is love, and also to show us what God's love does. The love of God is essentially active. He eats supper with sinners, goes home with the outcasts, embraces the downtrodden, touches the troubled, heals the sick, and saves us all from our wickedness. God's love gives to our lives hope, joy, and fullness. It gives to us strength, truth, peace and a genuine sense of self–worth. And God has done all this by means of the full measure of his devoted love—the life of His only Son sacrificed at Calvary. Thus, the love of God is neither idle nor cheap. He did what He had to in order to save us, and He did it to the fullest.

God's love is wonderful: gracious, merciful, longsuffering, faithful, and compassionate. He accepts us, suffers with us, stays with us, and holds on to us. He loves us all, not because we somehow earned it (which we cannot!), but in spite of the fact that not one of us deserves it! God is love, and He loves me because that is who and what He is.

> "THE LOVE OF GOD IS ESSENTIALLY ACTIVE."

Because of His love God responds to our needs and makes provision for us. And He does not tire of taking care of us. That is the great truth that gives power of our prayers, strength to our faith, and hope to our obedience. Thus, by love, the Father has invested Himself in us. We are His children and the Father's love never fails.

Yet, am I my Father's child in name only? Or am I my Father's child indeed? Do I love you? Do we love one another? Do we love our fellow man? Will we invest ourselves in one another just as God has done with us? Will we treat each other the way God treats us? Will we respond to one another with our Father's loving spirit, or with the mean, selfish, proud spirit of our enemy, the devil?

It is our hope that this issue of *Carolina Christian* will help us all in some way to reflect the love of God, loving each other as He has loved us.

Mike Mobley, a frequent Guest Editor for ***Carolina Christian,*** *can be contacted at 301 Reed Creek Rd., Mooresville, NC 28115.*

God's Love is Gracious

PETER RODE

In the book *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* the story is told of a young girl named Christina who leaves home to make a life for herself in the city. Her mother, Maria, goes looking for the girl because she knows what she will have to do to earn a living. After leaving pictures of herself in hotels, dives, and places of ill repute, Maria returns home empty handed and defeated. Some weeks later a rather disillusioned Christina discovers one of the familiar pictures, and on turning it over reads this invitation, "Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home." This story captures the essence of the grace filled heart of God.

> "The grace of God shown us through Jesus Christ must become the basis of how we ourselves treat people."

The doctrine of grace is perhaps the most important and far–reaching doctrine in scripture. It encompasses love, forgiveness, salvation, justification, redemption, and many others. It is foundational to our relationship with God Himself. Without grace we would still be separated from Him.

Two biblical stories that capture the essence of God's grace are the stories of Manasseh, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 33) and the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Both Manasseh and the prodigal turn from God in outright rebellion. Manasseh turns to idolatry and leads a whole nation astray, while the prodigal son disregards his father's wishes and does his own thing. Only when they sink to their lowest levels do they realize their need to turn back to God. When they do, the Lord graciously and willingly blots out their past rebellion and restores them to their previous positions. No further acts of penance are required, no probation...just full restoration!

Throughout history God has shown that He is truly gracious. he was under no obligation to create the universe and put man in it, but He did—because of grace. He is under no obligation to sustain His creation, but He does—because of grace (2 Peter 3:9). God did not have to elect Abraham as the progenitor of the nation of Israel, nor did He have to choose Israel as His special people and deliver her from slavery in Egypt, but He did—because of grace (Deuteronomy 7:7). God did not have to send His Son to die on the cross for all mankind, but He did—because of grace (Titus 3:3-7). The Lord's dealing with His people has always been on the basis of grace. This can be seen through the words of the prophets. Isaiah told them, "Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you" (Isaiah 30:18a). Joel makes this appeal to the people, "So rend your garments; return to the LORD yourGod, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:13). And Micah asks, "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18). Over and over again, as Israel moves farther and farther away from God, He sends them messages of encouragement to turn back, and all the while He is pictured as a wronged husband or a grieved father holding open His welcoming arms, waiting for the return of the wayward. Finally, when there is nothing more He can do, God promises a new, better covenant of grace, one that includes the forgiveness of sins. He didn't remove His grace from the face of the earth; rather, He makes it more available. And He makes it available through the death of His own Son, Jesus Christ! It is this death that atones for our sins and reconciles us with the Father (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

The grace of God shown us through Jesus Christ must become the basis for how we ourselves treat people. As His people we need to reflect the character of our Father. In Luke 6:38 Jesus says, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." This principle must extend to all facets of our lives, including the way we deal with others. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, which Jesus uses to illustrate the principle of reciprocity in forgiveness, a master graciously extends the forgiveness of a debt to a servant who is unwilling to show that same sort of attitude to others. Finally, when the master learns of the hard–heartedness of his servant, he withdraws his grace and demands full payment for the debt. The parable ends with the chilling words, "This is how the heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from you heart" (Matthew 18:23-35).

One revealing incident in the life of Jesus that serves as an illustration of how He deals with sinners—which includes all of us—is when the Pharisees and the teachers of the law confront Him with a woman (the man was conveniently absent) they "caught in the act of adultery." Instead of condemning her, Jesus teaches the self–righteous Jewish leaders a lesson in compassion and humility, and then proceeds to forgive the woman while challenging her to live a more moral life (John 8:1-11). Here is the Sinless One—the only one with the authority to condemn—pardoning! Jesus did this because His mission on earth was not to condemn, but to save (John 3:17). His mission was one of grace, not judgment.

As God's people who experience the grace of God daily, need to learn this lesson well. God is dealing graciously with us, having forgiven and still continually forgiving us, and unless we want to become like the unmerciful servant, we in turn need to extend this grace to others. As ambassadors for Christ we need to be reclaiming and rehabilitating sinners, not condemning them. We need to learn from Jesus that to do this we must lay aside the attitudes of condemnation, judgment, unforgiveness and self–righteousness that are sometimes so prevalent among us. Instead, we must confront wrong with the spirit of our Master.

After empowering the apostles with the authority to drive our demons and to heal the sick, Jesus sends them out on the "limited commission" with these words, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). I challenge you as one who has freely received the grace of God to freely extend that grace to others. That is the responsibility of grace.

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

The Mercy of God

Amos Allen

While growing up, any trip to a doctor prompted one question, "Will I be getting a shot?" In the summer before the third grade, Mother took me for a vaccination. The nurse prepared the syringe, and as she drew near, I jokingly began to cry out, "Mercy, mercy!"

My mother laughed, and I never felt the needle due to an overwhelming sense of relief. My relief came from the fact that Mother had laughed instead of frowning. I had used a "church word" and I was afraid that it had been used inappropriately. I didn't really know what mercy meant, but evidently it was okay to say it in this situation. In much the same way, there are a lot of folks today who do not have a firm appreciation of the merciful character of God.

"Does it break a command of God when I give mercy rather than judgment?"

THE NATURE OF GOD

There is an interesting story in Exodus 33. The Israelites have left Egypt and are preparing to move closer to Canaan. Moses and God are getting along well, but Moses wants more. He asks God to show him His glory. God agrees; He will show Moses His goodness, say His name and give him a glimpse of His back. In the middle of all this is a sentence that seems out of place. God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19).

What does mercy have to do with all this glory that Moses is about to witness? I suggest that mercy is a basic quality of God's glory, just like His holiness. Could it be that God is glorious partly because of His compassion for people? The text certainly seems to indicate that the glory of God is manifested in His mercy.

And remember when Jonah preached to Nineveh? Tragically, he became upset when the people repented, giving him reason to make this remarkable accusation, "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2). I cannot help but laugh at Jonah's upside down view of what God is about, but I am thankful nevertheless that he put it so well. Our understanding of God should be filled with reminders that He is merciful. God's book is filled with such descriptive pictures.

Another example magnifying the mercy of God can be found in Psalm 51. There, David both asked for and described God's mercy. Psalm 51, which is linked to David's adultery with Bathsheba, begins with this plea, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions." Another Davidic psalm paints a vivid picture of the bigness of God's mercy. Psalm 103:10-13 reads:

"He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His love for those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him."

On another occasion David made the

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mistake of counting the number of men in his army. It seems to have been a self–glorifying exercise. God was upset and told David to choose one of three options as a punishment: three years of famine, three months of war, or three days of plague brought on by the Lord's angel. David chose the plague, saying, "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercy is very great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men" (I Chronicles 21:13). David had a unique ability to sin in big ways, but he also saw God as being big in mercy.

In connection with all these references, it is interesting to note that one of God's best attributes is so closely tied to our sinfulness. Without sin, there would be no need for mercy, yet without mercy sin would be even more devastating (if possible). The connection of mercy to sin reminds us of the difference between us and God: the mercy is His and the sin ours, and yet God takes our sin and gives us His mercy. What an awesome God!

DANGER

There is a danger here to be avoided: we cannot plan to sin and then count on His mercy to mop up after us. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. It is His gift to be given as He sees fit. Mercy is a quality of God that is dependable, but not under our control. God's mercy is not subject to our dictates.

God chooses when to give mercy and when to withhold it. In anticipation of the wrath of God being poured out on His sinful people, the prophet Habakkuk once asked the Lord to remember that mercy was an option (Habakkuk 3:2), but to simply ask was the best he could do. God could not, and cannot, be dictated to.

What I consider ridiculous or unfair is my way of thinking. Not only does God know better than I do about how to run the world, but who do I think I am to question Him? Thankfully, in His mercy, He allows us to even do that.

We may not demand mercy, but we can certainly ask for it. Several years ago I was involved in a discussion about righteousness, and I declared that I wanted justice from God! I was pretty sure of myself at the time. My mother replied, "I want mercy, not justice." The tax collector (Luke 18), the thief on the cross (Luke 23), and my mother all agree: "Be merciful to us."

Further, just as we cannot demand or control God's mercy, neither can we predict it. In His loving wisdom God displays mercy at surprising times. Paul was one of those surprised by the mercy of the Lord, and for him that mercy was not easily forgotten. Writing to Timothy he said,

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (I Timothy 1:15-16). Paul viewed his ministry and his very life as a demonstration of God's expansive mercy.

THE NATURE OF PEOPLE

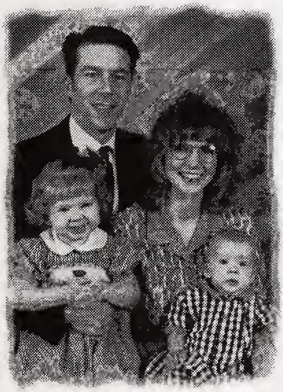
Though created in the image of God, the fact remains that we are still His opposite in many ways. When He comes looking for us we hide behind trees of religion or self–importance. What He considers important we minimize or simply dismiss. Words He plainly speaks we dissect and distort. Note the following examples of these claims.

On two occasions Jesus quoted from

Hosea 6:6, "for I desire mercy, not sacrifice," for the purpose of showing how God's people had missed the essential issues. He quoted this text when he was being questioned by religious experts about His behavior. The first time is in Matthew 9:9-13, when He was at a meal with the non–religious. In those days who you ate with spoke volumes about your spiritual state; sinners ate with sinners and the righteous ate with the equally righteous. The "authorities" wanted to know how Jesus could talk and act religious and then go laugh and carry on with people who were obviously not upright?

In Hosea's day the people had turned away from God while at the same time claiming that they still acknowledged Him (Hosea 8:2). There was a covenant, but they weren't living by it. Jesus accused the religious leaders of ignoring the fundamental purpose of that same covenant—relationship. They were far from God and worked hard to keep others away as well.

The second time He quoted Hosea appears in Matthew 12:7. He had been assailed for not keeping His followers from harvesting and then eating on the Sabbath. Jesus then gave examples of others who broke the law but were not condemned,



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suggesting that too strict of an interpretation may run counter to the purpose of God. He challenged them to understand God and His commands in a different way. Otherwise, they would continue to "condemn the innocent," which is obviously not pleasing to God.

I have some questions at this point. Am I using rules of God or have I made up my own that hurt rather than help? Do my rules or my interpretations misrepresent God? Do they promote mercy or judgment? Could they be keeping people away from God? Also, how should I show mercy? Does it break a command of God when I give mercy rather than judgment? Do I think first of compassion or constraint?

In wrestling with these questions, consider these texts. In Matthew 5:7 Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." One of the great principles of life is that you get what you give. If mercy is what I delight in, then I shall receive mercy. On the other hand, if judgment is my delight, then judgment shall be my reward.

Christ also said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). There's the answer to the question "How should I show mercy." The answer is to be like God in showing mercy. Give lots of it to people. Do it in mind and in conversation. Express it in prayers and action. Be like God, who is rich in mercy (Ephesians 4:2). Is it possible to overdo it? Perhaps, but not likely. If it becomes a problem God will help you achieve a balance. Wouldn't you love, though, to be characterized as someone who "lavishes mercy" on people?

TRIUMPHANT MERCY

James wrote, "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:12-13). Laws, rules, commands and such obviously have their place. They are wonderfully helpful, but God reveals Himself as merciful and encourages His people to be the same. Rule–keeping alone does not encourage maturity or produce exceptional character in people. So what does God want us to do if merely keeping rules is not the answer? Listen to the prophet Micah:

> "With what shall I come before the Lord
> and bow down before the exalted God?
> Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
> with calves a year old?
> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
> with ten thousand rivers of oil?
> Shall I offer my first born for my transgression,
> the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
> He has showed you, O man, what is good.
> And what does the Lord require of you?
> To act justly and to love mercy
> *and to walk humbly with your God."*
> (Micah 6:6-8)

If I may paraphrase the last sentence, "Treat people fairly and overwhelm them with kindness. As you live this way, remember who you are in light of who He is."

Mercy is an appropriate response in most any situation. We are not far from the kingdom when we choose mercy over judgment.

Amos Allen can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

His Love is Longsuffering

PAUL MOBLEY

Upon first hearing the word "longsuffering" can have an ominous sound. In reality it is a very positive word when understood in the biblical sense. When practiced by humans it can be defined as patient suffering with the hope that rests in acts of brotherly love. When practiced by God, it is His willingness to be patient with and endure sinful people as an act of His loving care.

Jesus tells us that God's love sends rain and sun on both the evil and the good (Matthew 5:46). God's love is therefore longsuffering toward those who practice evil with the divine desire that they will change. For thousands of years, commencing with Adam and Eve, God has patiently suffered the sins and evils of men. Though many have not, may have responded to His loving word and care. His patience and love have born fruit.

The Christian has received salvation from God, through His Son, as communicated in His word. In that special relationship the Christian receives God's loving care for his daily needs (Matthew 6:24-34), whether they be spiritual or physical. As Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). And Peter advised his readers to humble themselves before God, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Anyone who has been a Christian for any length of time must confess, upon review of his life, that the longsuffering of God can be clearly seen. God loves us and suffers with us in loving care, no matter how long the trial (2 Corinthians 6:3-10).

And just as God has been and is longsuffering with us, so we are to be longsuffering with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul instructed the Colossians, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another…" (Colossians 3:12-13a). Virtually the same exhortation is give to the Ephesians, "…with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). The love of God is translated to, and through, Christians in face–to–face visible actions and attitudes. When we respond properly to the love of God, we have the same longsuffering attitude toward each other.

The longsuffering nature of God's love can also be seen in His desire that not even one soul be lost. As Peter put it, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Christians realize that the love of God and Christ cannot be taken from them by anything in the temporal world (Romans 8:37-39). Rather, we have a hope that is real and enduring because of the longsuffering love of God. How much more, then, should our own love toward others—whether they be enemy, friend, relative, or brother—be longsuffering with genuine interest and care?

You can contact Paul Mobley at Rt. 3, Box 410, Cynthiana, KY 41031–9434.

His Love is Faithful

Mike Mobley

The father's younger son had asked to receive his inheritance early so that he could see how the other half lived while he was still young. Perhaps he thought he might be missing something, wondering if the other life was better and more exciting. Whatever the son thought, the father did not stand in the way and gave the boy his inheritance. After wasting it all only to end up eating out of the same trough as the pigs he fed, the son realized his mistake and became regretfully aware of what he left back home.

So, the runaway went back home and found his father waiting! No, the father was not ranting and raving and he did not berate his son. Everyday he had gone out to the top of the hill looking for his lost son. Then one day he did indeed see his son returning and the father ran to him. He wrapped his arms around the boy, kissed him, and called for a celebration (Luke 15). This father loved his son faithfully!

Loyalty. Devotion. Commitment. One who is faithful keeps his word and will never let you down. So it is with God. Nothing anyone can do or say will make God turn His back on you. The Lord will not give up on you. God is love and the character of His love is faithfulness. Praise be to the God who was, is and always will be faithful!

Divorce and broken homes. Child neglect and abandonment. Betrayed and used. Deserted and disappointed. Lying and cheating. Faithfulness is a quality so seldom nurtured in the character of many people today. A man's word is no longer trusted. And saddest of all is that God's own children so often lack the quality and character of faithfulness.

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Jesus has taught us that the nature of our lives as God's children is to shine the light of the Father into this sin–darkened world. If the light of God's love could be refracted through a prism, His faithfulness would be seen as one element of the spectrum. Does the world see the faithfulness of God in us? Can our word be trusted? Can the Father Himself trust us to do His will? Can we be counted upon to serve and live as He has instructed us? Can the church and each member trust us to be there for them? Can our spouses trust us when we are not with them? Can our children trust us to be available to share in their lives and nurture their development?

One more thing about the faithful love of God: He has never turned away from His children when the going got rough. He called Noah to build the ark when there was no obvious hint of a flood and to preach to an unbelieving generation. The people scoffed, but God never left Noah's side. He called Abraham from his home to journey into the unknown, and He wandered with Abraham. The Israelites were constant complainers in the wilderness, but God stayed with them, even though they did not always trust Him. Peter's mistakes and failings are well documented, but God never turned away. Paul lamented to Timothy that "at my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me," but then affirmed the faithfulness of God by saying, "but the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Timothy 4:16-17a).

Love is faithful, and God is faithful love personified.

God's Love is Compassionate

Sharon Albright

Suffering isn't pretty, but it can be productive. Suffering isn't desirable, but it is inevitable. And suffering is not isolated; it is universal. Recognizing these truths, what should be the Christian's response to suffering? To answer that we must first ask, "What is God's response?" And the answer is that an appropriate, godlike response to suffering and sin will spring from a compassionate heart.

> "The goal of Christian character is to be like God. We yearn for a heart like Jesus."

Scripture affirms and demonstrates over and over that God has a compassionate heart. He sent His one and only Son in order to relieve mankind's suffering in sin. He gives us continued forgiveness and undeserved blessings to lessen our suffering.

And just as the Father has a compassionate heart, so does the Son. While on earth Jesus healed the sick, comforted the sorrowful, lifted the discouraged, and reached out to the untouchables. It was not just the physical plight of others that moved Jesus, but their spiritual suffering as well. He saw His whole purpose to be that of seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). He spent His time teaching how to mend broken relationships with both men and God. He wept over Jerusalem because of her refusal to accept His remedy for suffering and sin. Then He ultimately submitted Himself to physical and spiritual suffering to wipe out the greatest suffering that man could know—separation from God.

The goal of Christian character is to be like God. We yearn for a heart like Jesus. But how can we develop this kind of selfless compassion? We must allow ourselves to be inconvenienced, to get dirty, to show mercy, and to shower unconditional love. And we must show this heart to all without the recipients having to pass a "worthiness test." After all, how would we fare on such a test if God were the examiner and our own worthiness has to be proved before blessings were bestowed?

We must imitate the compassionate love of God in Jesus in a hands on, personal, one–to–one kind of way. Look for needs close around you. They may be sitting at the next desk or living in the house next door, just waiting for someone like you—someone like Jesus—to relieve their suffering. When you see the need ask, "What would Jesus do?" and then let Him do just that through you. It won't always be comfortable, easy, or socially acceptable, but it will be compassionate. The woman at the well was an outcast, suffering from numerous broken relationships. The ten lepers were isolated and suffering. Demon–possessed Mary was offensive and suffering. Alcoholics and addicts are distasteful and suffering. The abused and neglected are weak and suffering. But what limits did Jesus put on His compassion? What limits are there to God's compassionate love? And what about us?

Sharon Albright is a school teacher, wife, mother and homemaker. Her husband, Rob, preaches for the Thomasville Church of Christ. She can be contacted at 612 Lakeview Dr., Thomasville, NC 27360.

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What I Saw in Haiti

ALAN NEWBERRY

bon–swa! I have just returned from the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, and arguably in the world; or is it?

I have spent a week trying to find words to describe the land, but I can't. We arrived at Cap Haitien International Airport November 7. This airport serving the second–largest city in Haiti (population 110,000) was the most shoddy I have ever seen. Though I expected poverty, I was still unprepared for what I saw. Cap Haitien appeared to have been destroyed by a hurricane, built upon the ruins, and hit again. A third of the "houses" had no roof over the cement blocks that formed the walls. Goats, pigs, dogs and chickens ate from the piles of trash that lined the roads. Women washed their clothes and their children in the green and brown water around the public well. We stayed at the best looking place around—an orphanage composed of four block and stucco buildings with tin roofs, one well and a crude kitchen. How could anything good come from a God–forsaken place like Haiti?

It took a few days of visiting remote churches before I stopped focusing on material filth and started seeing spiritual beauty in the loving eyes of my Haitian brothers and sisters. I began to see that poverty did not necessarily equal misery.

It finally struck me Sunday morning when we went with the teachers and students of the Center for Biblical Training out to a small church in La Molere. Once again I noticed that the building was made of tree branches and rough–hewn wood. But I became enthralled as a resounding "Amen" arose after every other sentence while one of our group members was teaching. I was captivated by the heart–felt praise of these Christians who lived in houses built of mud and palm leaves. The children who crowded between us sat with eyes and ears glued to the teachers and the lessons and sang from memory loud and glorious songs of praise to God.

As we visited with the twelve students from the preacher training center that afternoon, we learned how much they had given up in order to study and preach God's word. Serving God was all that mattered to them. All I could think of was one word..."Amen!"

On the way back to the orphanage we stopped at the house of brother Germius Dieudonne. His house had only two small rooms, but was home to eight people. The floor was dirt, and newspaper covered the walls. His wife was in bed, having recently been run over by a car. He had almost nothing, yet his main concern was to make us comfortable, offering a place to sit and a Coke to drink.

By the end of the day I knew God had not forsaken these people. I could see Jesus in all of the joyful smiles and thankful eyes of my Haitian brothers and sisters. They may be poor in worldly wealth, but I've never seen people who are richer in spirit. The 90 degree November heat could not compare with the warmth of the smiles and gleaming eyes of the children who excitedly accepted the candy and balloons we gave them. These people are thankful for what they have, and Jesus is always foremost in their lives.

Haiti may economically be one of the poorest countries in the world, but in Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus says, "Do not lay up

(continued on next page)

Hating Sin

PAUL JARRETT

In Psalm 119:104 David voices his hatred for every false way, "Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way." As Christians we should all share David's hatred for sin. I can think of only four reasons why a Christian would not hate sin as he ought.

First, we will not hate sin as we ought until we learn to ***see people.*** Some think they are hating sin when they merely focus on issues of right and wrong. However, real hatred of sin comes only when we see the hurt sin inflicts on people.

Second, we will not hate sin as we ought until we ***view people with love.*** Some think they hate sin because if offends them the way the presence of the sinful woman offended Simon in Luke 7:36-50. However, real hatred for sin comes only when we truly love the people afflicted by sin.

Third, we will not hate sin as we ought until we ***see sin.*** Read texts such as Galatians 5:19-21 in order to appreciate that which is sin to God. I have seen too many churches split by members who thought they were exhibiting hatred for sin in debating some point of doctrine, while in reality those on both sides were guilty of sins such as strife, outbursts of anger, disputes and dissension.

Finally, we will never hat sin as we ought until we learn to ***see our own sin first.*** Jesus taught that we must first address the sin in our own lives before we can assist our brethren in dealing with the sin in their lives (Matthew 7:1-5).

Through God's eyes (His precepts) we learn to see things as they truly are.

Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ and can be contacted at 1450 Mandarin Rd., Naples FL 34102.

(continued from previous page)

for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I have learned how true this is from my fellowship in Haiti. A nice carand house are not what is really important. Take the shirt off my back, crush my car, and take my money. The Lord will shine even brighter!

Alan Newberry is a member of the church in Hendersonville, NC, and a junior at West Henderson High School. He lives at 101 Braemar Dr., Hendersonville, NC 28791. His e-mail address is: alannewberry@juno.com

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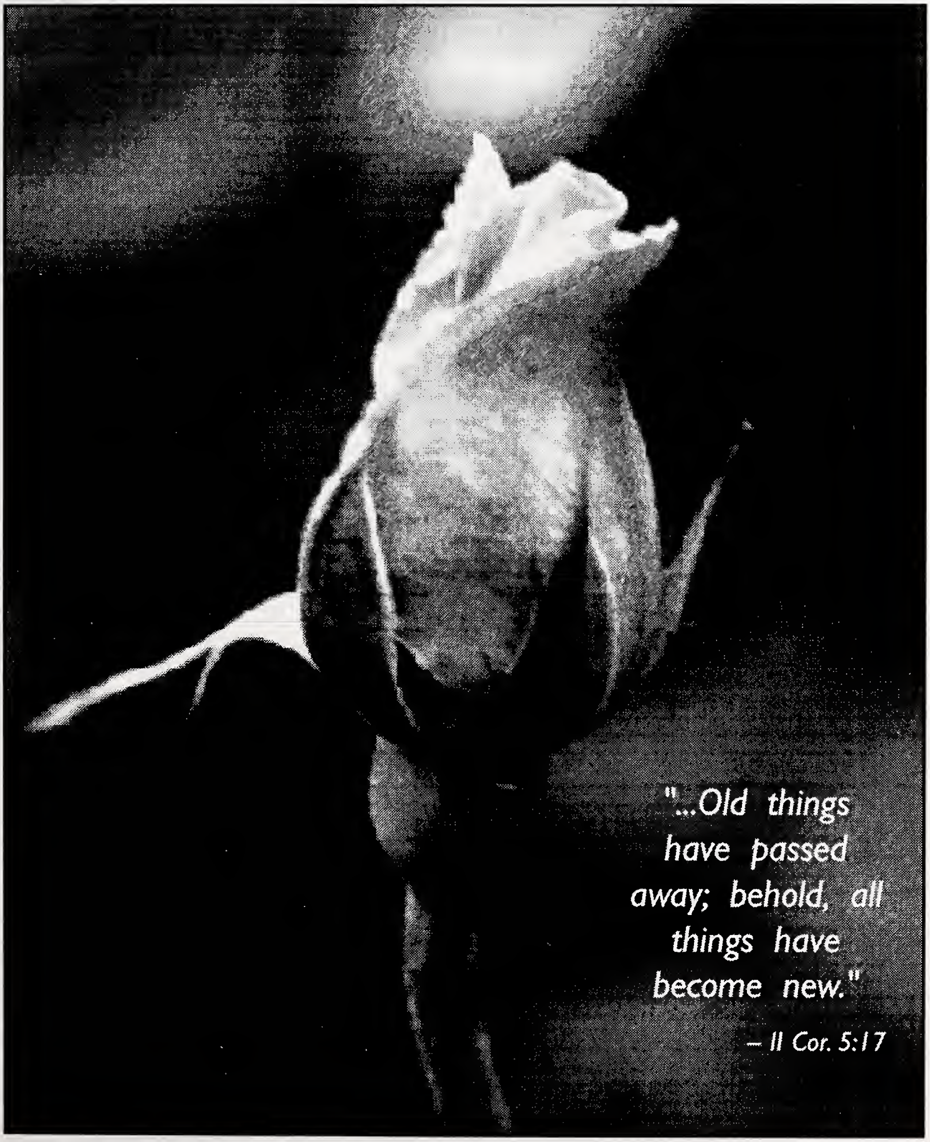

"...Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

– II Cor. 5:17

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Editorial:

The Mystery of Growth

DENNIS CONNER

A few years ago I was asked by a good brother to read over some information about yet another new evangelistic method that utilized an automated telephone device. Evangelism by automated telemarketing! The information packet guaranteed that the device would produce more leads than you could ever hope to follow up on; guaranteed to make your church grow. Guaranteed, the info said, or your money back! My brother was genuinely concerned for the growth of his congregation and was simply seeking something that would work, and I would never for a moment question his motives for seeking to grow. What I do question, however, is the "quick fix" and the "get rich quick" mentality that does sometimes characterize our pursuit of church growth.

In the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven Jesus taught that the kingdom would grow to exceed all expectations. Today we have convinced ourselves that if we can just be clever enough, resourceful enough, and work hard enough we can ourselves bring about the truthfulness of those parables. That is the key, isn't it? Keep exploring for ever newer and better methods? Keep expanding our resourcefulness? And we will grow! And God will be so pleased with us. Right? Well, actually, wrong. So says Jesus in the parable of the growing seed in Mark 4:26-29. Here's the way He tells it: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, and he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." If we ever for a moment think that the growth of the kingdom stands or falls with human resourcefulness and effort, then we don't know much about the kingdom.

We must always remember, as someone in the course of my reading has said, that in the kingdom of heaven there is a King, and that King is God, and in His kingdom God is sovereign. That is the point of the parable before us. The growth of the kingdom is first and foremost the result of the activity of God. We oftentimes forget that.

Before we go any further, understand that this parable is not an encouragement to human inaction and passivity. As Jesus clearly indicated, it was necessary that the seed should be scattered, and that is our responsibility. It does, however, rebuke "a feverish trust in human agency. It shames complacent self–praise" (A. M. Hunter). When Jesus came preaching that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," the question would naturally arise, "How long will it take for the kingdom to reach fullness?" There were times when people took matters into their own hands and tried to force the fullness of the kingdom (John 6:15). In this parable, however, Jesus confounds false expectations and declares the outright mystery of the kingdom's growth.

How God grows His kingdom is a mystery to man. The kingdom is like a farmer who did the necessary cultivation, planted seed and then could only wait patiently until the seed began to grow. After planting the seed all he can do is to go about his daily routine, and wait. True, he can continue to cultivate and water, but he cannot *cause* the seed to grow. The growth itself is a mystery to him. He can only trust the One who created the seed and wait until the harvest is ready. So it is with the growth of the kingdom.

Again, this parable does not condone inactivity by believers—we still must scatter the seed bybroadcasting the message of God's saving grace in Christ—but at the same time it reminds us that we have no control over how people receive the message. How is it that many times the person we think is on the verge of becoming a Christian has a change of heart and never does, while at other times the very person we thought would never in a million years respond to the good news, does? Why does one church employ a certain method with great success, while another church using the same method under much the same conditions experiences failure? Why does the gospel take root in some wicked hearts and not in others? We don't know the answers to all those questions. We do what we can and trust God, not our resources, for the growth. Paul understood this when he wrote to the Corinthians, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

The story also reminds us that *the power is within the seed.* The seed contains within itself, as George Buttrick observes, "the mystery of life—spontaneous, self–ordering, self–developing." The seed is planted in the earth and soon the mystery unfolds. It dies to itself as new life springs from within. The blade of new growth breaks the surface and bursts forth into the sunlight. It continues to grow into a mature plant until finally it is ready to be harvested.

Again, so it is with the kingdom. The kingdom of God has within it, like the seed, the power for new life and growth. It possesses an inherent power for new, developing life. And note that in the progression of the parable the scattered seed eventually becomes a crop. Seed by seed, one by one, the mystery of growth is repeated until there is a crop ready to be harvested. How, we cannot say; but we trust the King of the kingdom.

So what are the implications of the story for churches and ministries today?

First, it helps us to see our work in proper perspective. Does it ever seem to you that the harder you work in the kingdom the less fruit you see from your labor? If so, then perhaps your trust has been misplaced or misguided. In which do you put the greatest trust, the method or the mystery? John Purdy writes, "The parable...reminds us that it (may not be) the tireless, restless worker who is the model of faithfulness. It is the one who sows the seed and trusts the promise." We can preach our persuasively best and work as hard as we can, but it is still God who will grow His kingdom. We really don't have much room for boasting.

Second, the power is in the message, not the method. Methods are merely instruments by which the seed is scattered. They cannot themselves cause the seed to take root and grow. The message of renewing life in Jesus Christ cannot be contained within any single methodology or ministry. Some folks are better farmers than others, but both still get results. How so? Because they both may be using the same kind of seed, and the power for life is contained within the seed.

The following quote from Prentice Meador, Jr., sums up well the message this little story has for us: "How long will it take? That question is answered in God's own time frame. The task of man is to be patient. In faith, God's people join God in His mission and believe with confidence and assurance that He will bring His mission to fulfillment."

If we will faithfully plant, He will faithfully increase.

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Associate Editorial:

What's Wrong With Our Country?

Jim Mullican

Many of us are old enough to remember a time when we never locked the doors of our houses. Church buildings were usually left unlocked. As a boy, I could ride my bicycle to school or the movie theater, put down the kick–stand, and know it would still be there when I returned; I never had a bicycle lock. Car ignitions had both a "lock" position and an "off" position, and from the latter it was possible to crank the car without a key, but few ever worried about car theft. Many people just simply left the key in the ignition.

Some remember when Rhett Butler's statement to Scarlett O'Hara in the movie *Gone With the Wind* ("Frankly, my dear, I don't give a d---") caused many in the audience to gasp in shock. Today, we don't even flinch at language that is much worse. Today immorality is rampant on TV, and even worse in many movies. Forty years ago, an unwed mother was a scandal, but the newspapers today carry proud announcements of births outside marriage. These days it's illegal to refuse to rent to an unmarried couple; or, for that matter, a homosexual couple. They can charge discrimination against one who seeks to be guided by the Bible.

Growing up, I never knew anyone who smoked marijuana or used other illegal drugs, but today they are everywhere and are fueling the rising crime rate. Illegal drugs cost more for a heavy user than most honest jobs pay, so the users turn to theft and robbery to get the money to buy their drugs.

The list could go on and on — abortion, euthanasia, divorce, child abuse — but we're all aware of the problems. The real question we must face is this: What is the underlying cause of the crime, violence, filth and immorality so widespread in our nation as we near the end of the twentieth century?

I think the Bible gives us a clue. The time period covered by the book of Judges is probably the most chaotic, lawless and irreligious period in Israel's history. As the book closes, the author explains why this was so, "In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25).

This is very much what has happened in our own society. The courts and Congress have become hostile to Christianity, even though our founding fathers staunchly sought to build a nation based on Christian principles. The exclusion from our schools of the Bible, prayer, and any teachings on divine creation, coupled with the promotion of the evolutionary theory, has resulted in people who think they are only animals. Consequently, they live like animals. Each one does as he sees fit and usually shows little concern for anyone else.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." This is true not only of individuals, but also of our nation as a whole. God destroyed the Amorites when their sin reached its full measure (Genesis 15:16). If we continue the way we're going, how long will America last? We need to be teaching the gospel to all we can, not only because God said to and we are concerned about their eternal destinies, but also because whether or not our grandchildren live in the United States of America may be at stake.

Dealing With Diotrephes

Paul Jarrett

"I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church" (3 John 9-10).

If you have been in the church any length of time at all, you have probably come in contact with a "Diotrephes." While the church has far more members with the character of Demetrius, whom John commends in this letter, the sad truth is that one Diotrephes can undo the good done by a church filled with those like Demetrius. The question I would like to address in this article is that of how to deal with a Diotrephes.

First, we must understand the difference between a Diotrephes and a Demetrius. It starts with *attitude*. Where those like Demetrius desire to serve, those like Diotrephes seek only the preeminence. While it is obvious that God desires the spirit of a servant to reside in His people, those like Diotrephes are driven by selfish ambition. The fruit of their attitude is spelled out in texts such as James 3:14-16, "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

The difference between a Demetrius and a Diotrephes may also be compared to the difference *between words and actions*. Diotrephes exercised his power through words which directed attention away from his actions. Demetrius, on the other hand, was commended for his deeds. Jesus taught us to measure people by their fruit, not merely their words (Matthew 7:13-21).

Second, in order to deal with those like Diotrephes, we need to understand *what we have done to allow them to do their damage*. We have bought into a worldly model of church leadership and authority. Christ's example and Peter's exhortation in I Peter 5:1-3 should convince us of the fact that biblical leadership is exercised with a servant's mind and heart. Governments are to exercise their power for the benefit of their citizens (Romans 13:1-5), husbands and fathers are to lead for the benefit of their families (Ephesians 5:25-29; 6:4), and employers are to deal in a fair and just manner with their employees (Colossians 4:1). If a servant mind is required of those who rule in these spheres, how much more is it required of those who would lead God's people?

The Diotrephes of our day are also able to exercise their influence because we have adopted a view of faith which focuses more on what is taught than on what is practiced. While I would not wish for a moment to take away from the importance of what we teach, the truth is that the doctrine of Christ is to be one of practice, not mere talk. Doing the will of the Father involves just that—doing. In the familiar words of Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." To the degree we have reduced the test of faithfulness to words ahead of actions, we have opened the door to those with the spirit of Diotrephes.

Finally, if we are going to refute the influence of those who are like Diotrephes, *we must call attention to their deeds.* John said that this is what he would do when he confronted the original Diotrephes. We must have the courage to do the same. We must draw courage from knowing that while a Diotrephes may be able to drive us from the local church, they cannot drive us from Christ's church.

Before we confront others we need to first examine our own conduct (Matthew 7:1-5). We need to make it our aim not to "imitate what is evil, but what is good" (3 John 11). We need to be found "walking in the truth…in a manner worthy of God" (3 John 3-6). We need more Christians like Demetrius who "walk the walk," and fewer like Diotrephes who merely "talk the talk."

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

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The Fruit of Gentleness

MARGARET CURTIS

The memory is vivid as a snapshot in my mind. As if it were yesterday, I remember rushing in from school, changing my clothes and heading up the hill to the pear tree. Up I would climb, books in hand as I prepared to read and savor the fruit of my tree. Imagine what would have been my shock if some cool, spring afternoon I were to climb my tree, only to find that it had withered from lack of care and cultivating. How sad I would have been! It could have happened; and just as easily it could happen with the fruit the Holy Spirit has planted in our lives. They must be cultivated and continually nurtured or they, too, will wither away.

> "Being gentle requires that I show the love and compassion of Christ, both to the saved and the unsaved."

It is so easy for us to see that, in nature, fruit is born in direct proportion to the amount of care the plant is given. To reap healthy, delicious fruit requires a lot of work. Why, then, is it so difficult for us to accept that same reality in our spiritual lives? We will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives only to the extent that we are willing to put in the time and effort it takes to cultivate that fruit. The Spirit's fruit is within our reach, and God wants them all to be evident in our lives.

Regarding the fruit of the Spirit, there is a particular need in our lives, in the church and in the world to cultivate the quality of gentleness. It is a quality that is greatly misunderstood in our culture today. Most would see gentleness and strength as being mutually exclusive, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Christ was gentle, but He was certainly not weak and without strength.

What exactly, then, is gentleness; and how can I bear this fruit to others? True gentleness actually requires tremendous strength on our part as we seek to bring under control our passions and self–will for the benefit of others. Being gentle requires that I show the love and compassion of Christ, both to the saved and the unsaved. It means that I meet people where they are and where their need is, just as Jesus has done for me.

One area in which gentleness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit has been lacking is in evangelism. The approach of some is to tell people in a combative attitude where they are wrong and win all the arguments concerning doctrine and text, thinking that folks will then rush to be a part of the church. This is so contrary to the nature of Christ. We must instead reach out in compassion toward those who are lost and show our love. When the woman caught in adultery was thrown down at Jesus' feet, did He say, "Do you know how terrible you have been? Do you know how wrong you are and how far from God you have gone?"

The Twenty-Fourth Annual Lectureship

East Tennessee School of Preaching

James L. Meadows — Lectureship Director
(423) 691-7444

Lectureship Schedule

Sunday

10:00 a.m.	Introduction to Leviticus	**David Lipe**
11:00 a.m.	Overview of Sacrificial System	**Edwin Jones**
2:30 p.m.	Burnt Offerings	**Bill Nicks**
7:00 p.m.	Singing	**Mike Maddox**
7:30 p.m.	Youth: Fear Mother and Father	**David Powell**

Monday

8:00 a.m.	Preisthood Principles	**Tom Holland**
8:30 a.m.	Meal Offering	**Gary Summers**
9:30 a.m.	Peace Offering	**Ben Flatt**
	Class: Atonement	**James Rogers**
10:30 a.m.	Sin Offering	**David Vaughn**
	Ladies: Pure Religion	**Jane Brown**
11:20 a.m.	Trespass Offering	**Terry Wheeler**
2:00 p.m.	The Consecration of Aaron & His Sons	**Charles Brown**
2:50 p.m.	Clean and Unclean Animals	**Buster Dobbs**
	Class: Types and Shadows	**David Pharr**
3:40 p.m.	Purification of Women	**Anthony Hixson**
7:00 p.m.	Singing	**Mark Aites**
7:30 p.m.	Respect of Person	**Michael Gurganus**
7:45 p.m.	"Strange Fire"	**Tom Holland**

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Leviticus

March 1-4, 1998
6608 Beaver Ridge Road, Knoxville, TN 37931

Lectureship Schedule

Tuesday

8:00 a.m.	Preisthood Principles	Tom Holland
8:30 a.m.	Leprosy	Mark Altee
9:30 a.m.	Uncleanliness	Rihcard Melson
	Class: Atonement	James Rogers
10:30 a.m.	Day of Atonement	Robert Taylor, Jr.
	Ladies: Pure Homes	Irene Taylor
11:20 a.m.	The Place & The Prohibition	William Woodson
2:00 p.m.	Purity	Jim Laws
2:50 p.m.	Regulations & Restrictions	Lennie Smith
	Class: Types and Shadows	David Pharr
3:40 p.m.	Prevention & Protection	Bobby Duncan
7:00 p.m.	Singing	Ken Forrest
7:30 p.m.	Aaron: God's Appointed High Priest	Eddie Cornelius
7:45 p.m.	Holy, Holy, Holy	Wendell Winkler

Wednesday

8:00 a.m.	Preisthood Principles	Tom Hollan
8:40 a.m.	The Set Feasts	Jerry Jenkins
9:30 a.m.	Keeping Order	Kenneth Randolph
	Class: Atonement	James Rogers
10:30 a.m.	The Sabbath for the Lord	Gene Stilwell
	Ladies: Pure Lifestyles "Holy"	Jane Washington
11:20 a.m.	The Year of Jubilee	Charles Box
2:00 p.m.	Reward of Obedience	E. Claude Gardner
2:50 p.m.	Retribution for Disobedience	James Meadows
	Class: Types and Shadows	David Pharr
3:40 p.m.	Vows and Tithes	Tim Nichols
7:00 p.m.	Singing	Herb Byrd
7:30 p.m.	Honor the Aged	Ben Justice
7:45 p.m.	Jehovah Spoke	Clayton Winters

All those things would have been true. He could have used her as an example of righteous judgment and condemnation — and who had more reason to be righteously indignant than God in the flesh? What we see, however, is nothing but complete love and gentleness as He tells her that He does not condemn her, and that she should put this life behind her and go on. In our encounters with the lost we must meet them with the gentle spirit of Christ, not the combative and condemning spirit of His detractors.

Another area in which gentleness is greatly needed is that of ministry. In 2 Timothy 2:24 Paul pours out his heart to the young man he loved as a son, "...the servant of the Lord must not strive; but must be gentle unto all men...with patience and gentleness correcting those who are in opposition..." Could this be the same Paul we read about in Acts 15:39 when Barnabas wanted John Mark to go with them on their second journey? Regarding the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, Luke recalls that "the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder from one another." Throughout his many years of ministry to others Paul learned some hard lessons about life. One of the lessons he learned, and sought to share with Timothy, was that the fruit gentleness is to be preferred over a harsh and authoritarian spirit.

I am so grateful that in all the things that God saw fit to leave me in His word, He gave me so many examples of people who are like me. I am instilled with the hope that I can grow into what He wants me to be. I do not just decide to be gentle; I must grow into it. No matter how much I want to be gentle and to manifest it to others, the only way this will happen is through my willing cooperation with the Holy Spirit as I mature spiritually.

There are several ways the fruit of gentleness is cultivated as I cooperate with the Spirit. One way requires that I take the time to be gentle. I can get so caught up in a job, a hobby or even a just cause that I have no time left for tenderness and gentleness. We can be completely committed to a worthy cause and still lose our perspective as rightness

Palmetto Messenger Announces New Editor

The Board of Directors of *Palmetto Messenger* have announced that David Pharr is the new editor of the publication, succeeding the late Don Nix. Brother Pharr, who preaches for the church in Clinton, TN, is certainly no stranger to the Carolinas. He conducted a fruitful and greatly influential ministry of 25 years at the Charlotte Ave. church in Rock Hill, SC, before becoming Director of the East Tennessee School of Preaching outside Knoxville, TN. He also served as editor of *Carolina Christian* from 1989-93. He is the author of *The Beginning of Our Confidence*, a study guide for new Christians, and a book of outlines on the Minor Prophets.

Our prayers and best wishes are with David and *Palmetto Messenger*.

and justice take precedence over gentleness and tenderness. The disciples Jesus chose were involved in the greatest cause ever, and they were totally caught up in it. Yet do you remember the time they would not allow some little children to "bother" the Lord? Jesus' response was "Allow the little children to come to me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus never lost sight of the importance of taking time to pay attention to people and their needs. He gently took the children onto His lap. He took the time to talk with the woman at the well when no one else would, changing her life. Over and over we see Jesus taking the time to be tender and gentle with people.

Another way I can actively cultivate this fruit in my life is through the power of touch. Touching can be an awesome tool, yet is so sadly neglected in our society and often in the church. Doctors recognize the healing power of touch. Simply touching someone's arm in a time of pain communicates love in a way that words cannot. Children must be touched; they long for it. Courts are filled with young people in trouble, having grown up without hugs — without physical affirmations of love from those who should love them the most. We need to be touched; it is a physical need as well as an emotional one. Jesus knew that. He wasn't afraid to touch the untouchables. He touched the lepers, washed the feet of the disciples, and cuddled the little children — and I must be the same way. I must reach out to the sick, the dirty, the homeless, the hurting, the undesirables of this world. People in Jesus' own day longed for His gentle touch, and they still need it today. This means that I must be His hands.

There is so much pain in the world today that I believe one of the most significant ways to begin reaching them is through a revival of the fruit of gentleness. It has almost become lost in our world, and even in the church; but God has charged us to be a gentle people. People typically will respond to love before they do to condemnation. Gentleness leads them to Christ.

We need to be Jesus to this world. We need to remind people that "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). Everyone we meet is engaged in conflict; they need to see the gentleness of Jesus in us. May the Spirit of God have His way in our lives.

Margaret Curtis can be contacted at 1612 Brookway West Dr., Lewisville, NC 27023.

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The Assurances of God

JOHN FORSYTHE

In this day and age we are often disappointed with circumstances and events that come to us in our daily lives. The promotion we thought was ours went to someone else. The vacation we longed for and planned for was a disaster. The child with such great promise and potential turned his back on all our dreams and values and decided "I'm going to do it my way." The biopsy of our loved one was malignant in spite of our prayers. The dream house we had hoped for was always just out of our price range. On and on it goes. Things often turn out differently from what we had hoped for and brought us disappointment and uncertainty concerning the future.

In the midst of all these, and other, uncertainties we can rely on some absolute assurances. First, *we can* have riches beyond our wildest dreams! I'm not referring to the lottery or the Reader's Digest Sweepstakes. Those bonanzas of financial resources would eventually come to an end. The apostle Paul praised the God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Jesus teaches us in Matthew 6:20 to lay up treasures in heaven, where it will last forever. Just think, immeasurable wealth that will last throughout eternity! We will have a satisfaction that has never been known by the richest person who has ever lived on earth.

Second, *we can* have freedom from pain and sorrow. Scripture tells us in Revelation 21:3-4 that God will dwell among His people and He shall wipe away all tears and there shall be no death, no mourning, no crying and no pain. Then, in Revelation 22:14-15 we are told, "Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Heaven is an eternal refuge, free from all threats and all perils, being completely removed from evil. Evil, in any form, cannot enter the dwelling place of God and the righteous.

Third, *we can* live forever. Jesus explained to His disciples, "the unrighteous will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will enjoy eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). In John 3:16, that universally known and quoted verse, the Lord said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Since we have life without end, either in or out of Christ, let us earnestly prepare for that day when we will meet Him face to face. We who live in Christ will hear those everlasting words, "Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Finally, *we can* have the assurance of knowing where we will spend eternity. The apostle Peter tells us in his second epistle that through the promises of God we have been made partakers of thedivine nature (2 Peter 1:4). He continues by encouraging his readers to practice the qualities of moral excellence, knowledge, self–control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Peter 1:5-7). The practice of these qualities makes our "calling and election sure," leading to the assurance that entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied (2 Peter 1:10-11).

Isn't it wonderful to know, assuredly, that we can have riches beyond our dreams, freedom from all the ills of life and death, and eternal life in a home that a gracious God has abundantly prepared? Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

John Forsythe serves the Westside church in Rocky Mount, NC, as an elder. He can be contacted at P. O. 8619, Rocky Mount, NC 27804.

Turning Tombstones

MARK HUDSON

My wife and I lived across the street from the town cemetery. It looked like any one of thousands across the southern US The worn monuments told stories: “Killed in battle, 1865,” “Gone, but not forgotten,” “Asleep in Jesus”. Names and dates portrayed the histories of epidemics, infant deaths, tornadoes, and some very long lives. This one Arkansas cemetery, however, contained a dark story hidden beneath its sod because someone turned the tombstones.

Years earlier the “strangers” had moved to town to live and work. The husband and wife remained strangers for decades in spite of their best efforts to fit in. Their attempts to become acquainted were rebuffed because they were “Yankees,” strangers, different, odd. One day this husband and wife were killed in an automobile accident. The city fathers agreed to allow burial in the local cemetery with one condition: the caskets and tombstones could not face the east as did the locals. This couple was buried facing north as a testimony against them.

When children and visitors asked about the perpendicular tombstones, they would be told about the strangers. After years of this vivid reminder, one man spoke out. Enough was enough! He said the town had been wrong in its treatment of the couple while they lived. He also said the north–facing tombstones said more about the townsfolk than it did about the dead couple. The stones betrayed their prejudices, fears, superstitions, and unforgiving attitudes. The city fathers were unrepentant. So, in pre–dawn darkness, the conscientious man stole into the cemetery and turned the tombstones. No one bothered to move them back. Although to this day the caskets are still at odds with the rest of the dead, the tombstones face the morning sun. All appears peaceful and normal.

> LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO HARBOR ILL WILL, HATRED, AND SUSPICION. LIFE IS TOO UNCERTAIN TO WITHHOLD ACCEPTANCE, FORGIVENESS, AND LOVE.

While we might praise the man for turning tombstones and trying to turn hearts, his actions appear too little, too late. How much better would it have been to stand up for this couple while they still lived. Life is too short to harbor ill will, hatred, and suspicion. Life is too uncertain to withhold acceptance, forgiveness, and love. The apostle Paul writes: “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Mark Hudson, who preaches for the church on Whiskey Rd. in Aiken, SC, can be contacted at 1071 Kismet Dr. in Aiken, 29803.

Marriage Is Not Fifty–Fifty

NORMAN BALES

According to conventional wisdom, marriage is a fifty–fifty proposition. If each married partner will meet the other partner half way, a couple can expect to put together a satisfying relationship. It sounds good in theory, but the "meet- you-half-way" proposal is really a "half–baked" idea.

> "From a Biblical standpoint, human relationships are based on the servanthood mentality."

When you stop to think about it, numerous circumstances in domestic living render the "fifty-fifty" concept impractical. Like most married couples, Ann and I take on different responsibilities around the house. I carry the dirty clothes to the laundry room; she launders them. She prepares the meals; I clean up the mess. I'm not a bean counter by nature, so I don't know if the work load evens itself out or not. I do know that occasions arise when both of us have to do things that normally don't fall into our usual areas of responsibility. If we worry to much about load leveling, we'll wind up in frustration.

As I write these words, Ann is out of town. If I want to eat, I have two options: (1) prepare meals myself, or (2) visit a local fast food establishment. She can't give her fifty right now. Perhaps, she could have left some pre-cooked meals that I would only need to pop in the oven, but then she would have been going beyond her "fifty." We would then have to figure out which additional tasks I need to perform in order to level the load. Besides that, the process of normal living imposes many situations which make it impossible for one spouse to meet the other half way - business trips, illnesses and crises of various sorts.

The real problem with fifty–fifty becomes apparent when our self–absorption is exposed. We really can't deny our self–centeredness. It rears its ugly head in domestic situations almost every day. Because of selfishness, we worry more about whether we're getting everything we're supposed to get out of the relationship than we do about what we're supposed to be giving. Given our egocentric mindsets, we almost never agree on how much fifty percent is supposed to be. I've never met an accountant sharp enough to quantify relationship expectations.

From a Biblical standpoint, human relationships are based on the servanthood mentality. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, he took the lead in serving. Significantly, John prefaced the story by saying, "Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love." (John 13:1). After having ministered to their needs in a self denying manner he said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (verse 15). In the fifty–fifty arrangement, the emphasis is on getting love. In the example of Jesus, the emphasis is on giving the full extent of love. That's the only basis on which a satisfying marriage relationship can thrive.

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Expressly For Youth... the eXpress Files:

Jesus Is Coming!

JERRY SENN

Last quarter I did what more preachers should spend a few months doing—teaching teens. I was thrilled, challenged and impressed with the attitudes and knowledge of this vigorous bunch. The subject of our study was "Jesus Is Coming."

We discussed the different ways our religious friends view this subject. All the talk these days about the rapture, tribulation, anti–Christ, and the supposed one thousand year reign of Christ on earth was placed alongside plain Bible history to show that much of the popular teaching doesn't fit the facts. Following are some of the observations that came out of this study.

First, *the Old Testament is understandable and vital to our faith, rather than being a jumble of dry and confusing material.* The prophets paint word pictures of the future which were fulfilled in Jesus. Our class studied chapter two of Daniel (Nebuchadnezzar's vision) to show how beautifully and accurately it pictures, and was fulfilled by, Christ's first coming. If all Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Christ's first coming, then they are not talking about His secondcoming, as many believe.

We also discussed the many clear passages in the New Testament which teach that the purpose of Christ's first coming was to establish His spiritual kingdom. He came to build His church, to call out a saved people from a lost world. Many believe He came the first time to set up an earthly kingdom, but the fact is He never intended to establish an earthly kingdom or give Jews special privileges. We learned that He will come again to deliver up to God His already existing spiritual kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Teachers of the view called "premillenialism" mistakenly see two purposes, rather than one, in Jesus' first coming: (1) to establish an earthly kingdom for the Jews, and (2) to save mankind from sin. This is why many believe that Christ will come again to do what was left undone at His first coming. This inaccurate view makes the Lord a failure. The truth is that Jesus Himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world," and on the cross He announced "It is finished."

Second, *Christ's spiritual family (the church) is full of power and beauty—it is the ultimate fulfillment of His purpose (Ephesians 3:20-21).* I'm afraid we often picture the church as another earthly kingdom with externals getting more attention than a personal, spiritual relationship with Christ. The New Testament makes certain that Christ is coming again, whether we're ready or not. We must try to visualize His coming in order to make it real to us. It is the day on God's calendar for resurrection, judgment and eternal reward or punishment.

In our last class session I asked the class to answer the question: *What do teenagers need to know about the second coming of Jesus?* They gave three very powerful answers:

(1) **Jesus is coming!** He will split the heavens in a flash and time will be swallowed up in eternity. The fact that He hasn't yet appeared after 2,000 years has made many doubtful. However, 2 Peter 3 teaches that as surely as the flood actually happened, Jesus will return. The flood story shows that God will intervene in the natural order of things. When asked how we know for sure that Jesus will return, our teens

(continued on next page)

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

Hanoi, Vietnam... The government of Hanoi has adopted a change in its official policy toward both the West and religion. This will allow the churches of Christ in Vietnam to open their doors publicly. For 22 years they have been forced to meet in secret due to the government's repression of religion. Church leaders who did not flee the country were often imprisoned.

Antananarivo, Madagascar... The World Bible School has opened a new center in the capital city of the African island nation of Madagascar. It will teach both French and English in the center in addition to conducting worship services in the Malagasy language. There were 20 visitors the first week the center opened and currently there are more than 5,300 students enrolled in the two series courses.

Henderson, TN... Free-Hardeman University announces its 62nd Annual Bible Lectureship to be held February 1-6, 1998. The theme will be "At His Coming."

(continued from previous page)

answered, "The Bible teaches it," and "Jesus' body was raised." Resurrection proves Jesus was from God and that He will return as He promised.

(2) **We don't know when Jesus will come.** No man can know because He will come as a thief, when no one expects it. All efforts to predict the time of His coming are flawed.

(3) **We need to know the consequences of not being ready for Jesus' return.** Sin separates men from God, and unless we are forgiven by Christ's blood we will receive eternal punishment. The class members felt we need more and clearer teaching on the dangers involved in being unprepared to meet Christ. They felt that we tend to shy away from references to eternal hell and the terrors of torment. And they are right! To be unprepared for Christ's return is the ultimate mistake anyone can make. The teens emphasized that the way one becomes a part of Christ's kingdom is to trust Him and be immersed for the forgiveness of sins, then to stay close by His side as we are continually washed in His blood. They were concerned that prominent teachers so easily dismiss Jesus' clear teaching about how a person received forgiveness (Acts 2:38).

Teens need to face the reality of their own sin and Jesus' loving sacrifice to save them, because Jesus is coming—ready or not.

Jerry Senn preaches for the Hendersonville church in Hendersonville, NC. Submissions to this column are welcomed. If you would like to submit an article for publication in ***The eXpress Files,*** *please send it to Danny Boggs at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.*

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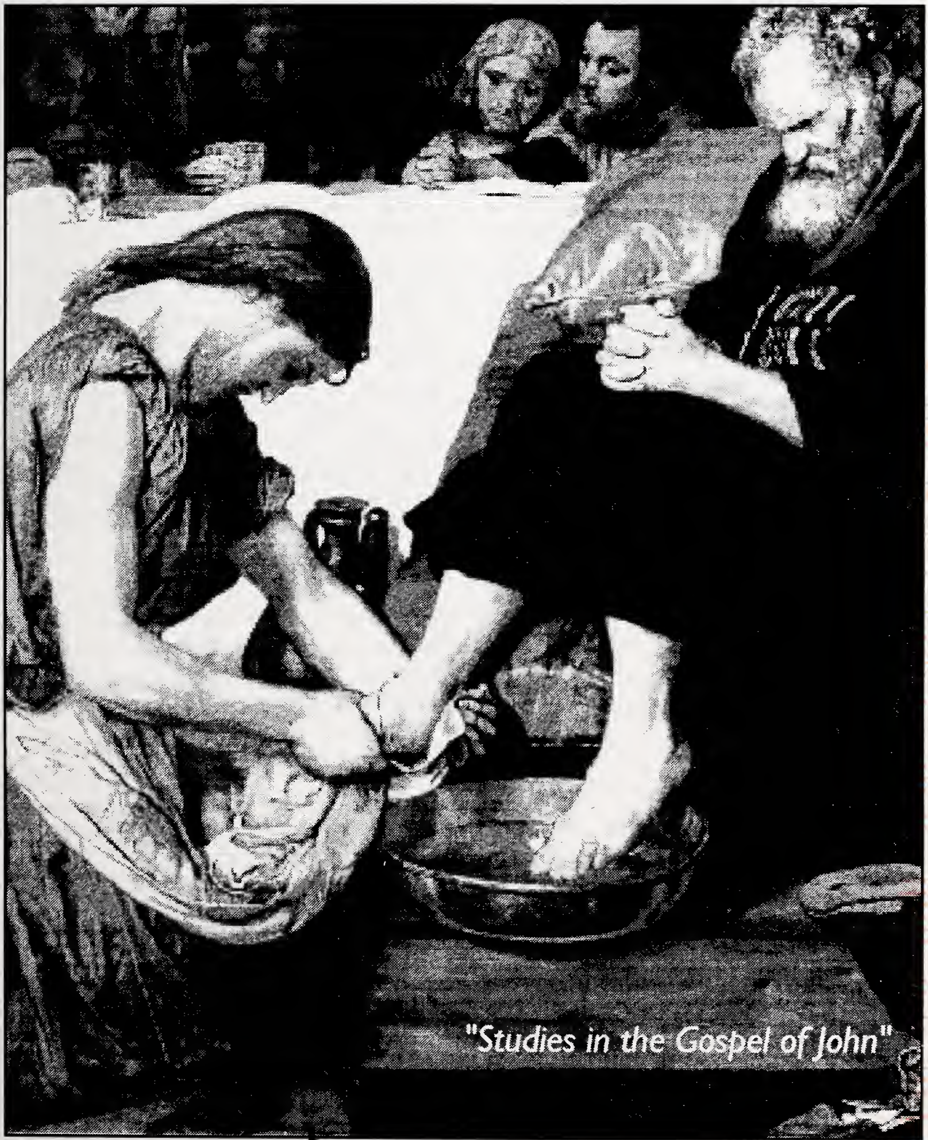

"Studies in the Gospel of John"

CAROLINA christian

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Will We See?

DENNIS CONNER

In John 9 we are introduced to a pathetic beggar who was reduced to that station in life because he had been born blind. It is easy for us to read this story in an "otherworldly" sense. That is, to read it as something completely outside our experience; it happened in another time and in another, entirely different culture. Yet, there is something about this incident that rings hauntingly true regardless of the time or the culture, for what better metaphor could be used to set forth the condition of humanity than that of a beggar born blind. In truth, does that not describe us all? However, the good news is that God has sent a Light to dispel our blindness.

In John 9:1-7 Jesus and the disciples had just left the temple when His eyes fell upon this man who had been blind from birth. In John's Gospel, when Jesus "saw" people the implication was often that He saw their possibilities for faith (cf. 1:42 and Peter; 1:47 and Nathanael). In this man the Lord recognized an opportunity for the glory of God to be revealed and a crucial spiritual lesson to be taught in the blind beggar's progress in faith.

The disciples, on the other hand, saw only a reminder of a doctrinal issue. They saw neither the man's suffering nor his possibilities. It was a popular notion in those days that such afflictions were a kind of punishment for sin, with the additional consequence that such people were often treated as outcasts. So they ask, "Who sinned in this case, the man or his parents?" Jesus' response was, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

With that, the Lord spat on the ground and made up a poultice of saliva and clay. He then took the mixture and dabbed it on the eyes of the blind man, who must have been startled. Then Jesus instructed him to "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." The symbolism of the moment was not lost on John, who notes that Siloam means "Sent." In John, Jesus is often pictured as the One who is sent by God.

John wastes no details on the miracle itself; he was only concerned with the essential facts. His record is brief and concise, "So he went and washed, and came back seeing." When the crude mixture fell from the man's eyes, so did his blindness. The light came on and a whole new world was immediately opened up to him. More than that, he was given a whole new life.

However, the story does not end there. It is more than just a nice story of healing. John was concerned with how people react to the Light sent from God. The once blind man responds with faith. The progression of his faith from ignorance to trusting belief has often been noted by scholars and teachers. He began with no faith, understanding Jesus to be only a remarkable man ("...a Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes," v. 11), then progressing to belief in Him as a prophet (v. 17), until finally there is a worshipful confession of Jesus as Lord and Son of God (v. 38). That is pretty much how we might expect the story to go, as well it should. What is not expected, however, is the response of others to the miracle, others who should have been prepared to receive the Light.

In John 9:8-12 we read of the immediate reaction from those who knew the man. "Isn't this the beggar?" "Yes, it is." For others, though, seeing is not always believing as they denied what their own eyes told them, "No, it's not him. It just looks like him." Now the center of a different kind of attention, the once blind man assured them, "It is me." His voice must have been filled with joy, excitement and a sense of wonderment at it all.

The man was then taken to the Pharisees (9:13-34) and what followed was a remarkable, almost unbelievable display of the power of darkness. The once blind man and his parents were subjected to three ludicrous interrogations.

In his record of the first interrogation (vv. 14-17), John noted that the miracle had taken place on a Sabbath. The Pharisees would have seen this as a violation of the law (but it was actually only a violation of their own human tradition). "How did this happen?" they demanded. And the now seeing man told them the story. "Impossible!" they responded. "This man (Jesus) could not be from God because he does not respect the Sabbath." Absolutely amazing! There was not one ounce of compassion to be found in their response. Only the biting judgment of legalism. Others present at the proceeding correctly reasoned, "Sinners can't do things like this. How can he be a sinner?"

In the second interrogation (vv. 18-23), the man's parents are summoned. "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Well, if he was blind, then how do you explain the fact that he now sees?" They had to be careful how they responded. These men were powerful. They had already declared earlier in these ridiculous proceedings that if anybody claimed to believe in this healer, they would be thrown out of the synagogue (translation: they would be thrown out of church)! That would have been devastating. So the parents framed their response carefully. "He is our son, but we don't know how it is that he now sees. He's old enough. Let him speak for himself." They buckled in to the pressure. They refused to take a stand for their own son.

Then, the now seeing man was called in once again (vv. 24-35). "Give God the glory," they challenged, "and not this sinner." "Whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know," he responded. "There is one thing I do know, however. Just a little while ago I couldn't see, and now I can." Then the Pharisees wanted to know again how that had happened. "Told you already," was the answer. Then a little salt for the wound, perhaps, "Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to want to become his disciples, too?" Shouldn't have said that. From that point on anger and spitefulness took over the Pharisees. They began to revile the man. All civility had vanished. "You may be his disciple, but not us. We are disciples of Moses! We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this character is from."

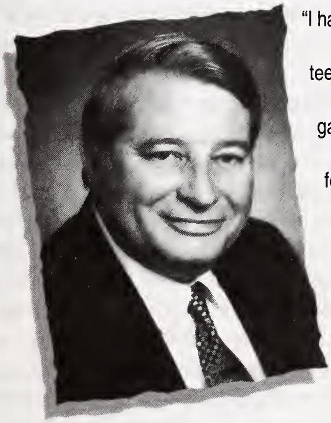
"Now that's an amazing thing," the once blind man answered incredulously. "Here I stand with my sight fully restored when I had been totally blind, and you don't know where he's from!" Then he proceeded to unleash an unassailable line of reasoning in which he concluded, "If this man were not from God, He could not possibly have done this" (v. 33).

Unable to respond with any sustainable logic of their own, and in complete defiance of the clear evidence before them, the Pharisees responded as rank religionists typically do when their settled convictions are being challenged and their time–honored traditions flaunted. They slithered down into the mud and began to assassinate the man's character. "You're nothing but an absolute sinner, and you dare to teach us anything!" And with that, they threw him out of the synagogue.

The atmosphere of hostility and unbelief

"I have never been happier in my service to God,"

says Bob Harris of Batesville, Arkansas.



"I have been preaching the gospel for many years, the last sixteen years as the full-time preacher for the Southside congregation in Batesville, Arkansas. For some time I have wished for an opportunity to further my study of God's Word and to improve my ability to share these truths with others. The Distance Learning Program at IBC has fulfilled my wish and more. I have been impressed with all the instructors and their ability to present the material in the various courses. They are obviously people of experience, and their concern for the success of their students and those who will be taught by the students, comes through loud and clear. The time spent in classes, research and extra reading, along with my responsibilities as a local preacher leaves me very little free time, but I can say sincerely, I have never been happier in my service to God. I appreciate IBC so much for giving me this opportunity."

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that dominates this story highlights the tension between light and darkness. Jesus was the One sent by the Father to bring understanding and life (light!) to a world that was paralyzed by darkness. Christ's presence in the world created a crisis for those confronted by Him, with one of two results following: sight for those who acknowledge that life without Him is really darkness, and darkness for those who claim to see without Him. The struggle pictured here is an enduring one and Christ's coming two thousand years ago still creates a crisis of belief. This story captures the essence of that struggle in the varied responses of the once blind man and the still blind Pharisees.

The man who had been blind stands as a symbol of every true disciple of Christ. He does not find Jesus, but Jesus finds him and sees within him the possibilities for faith and the glory of God. The man himself has nothing by which he might commend himself to God. Still, it is to this man that Jesus brings His life–giving light. When instructed by the Lord, he obeys, even though he does not fully understand. He does not come to the fullness of faith all at once, but his experience of Christ leads him deeper and deeper into understanding and faith. So powerful is that experience of Christ that he is willing to take his stand with the Giver of Light. He is willing even to be reviled and ridiculed. He is willing to confess what he knows in his heart to be true. And when confronted face to face with the Christ, he worships. He is a true disciple.

On the other hand we have the Pharisees, the "good church folks" of Jesus' day. Upon reading this story a troubling question comes immediately to mind: why couldn't they see Jesus? They had every advantage, seemingly. They had the Scriptures and the prophecies. However, they also had their human traditions and their firmly fixed perceptions of the kingdom and its King. So far as they were concerned, they knew all they needed to know; they were the teachers and had no further need to be taught by anyone else, especially a lowly beggar. But they, too, were faced with a decision: believe the logic, the evidences, the witness of the once blind man, or stay with their already fixed and inflexible interpretation of the law and the prophets. Their response? They stay in darkness. They closed their minds to any new understanding from God and saw themselves as the possessors of the final truth. They were more concerned with maintaining their institutions than with possessing true kingdom life. The Pharisees refused to open their hearts and their institutions to self–criticism, content instead to criticize others who did not yield to their understanding. They would not acknowledge their need, so their sin remained (v. 41).

The tragic irony of the Pharisees' condition was that they claimed to see everything all too clearly, but in reality they were totally blind to the Light before them. Had they recognized their need (their blindness), they would have come away from their encounter with the Light sent from God able to see. To be blind through no fault of one's own is tragic enough. To be blind by choice is the height of folly.

As has already been suggested, this story is our own story. We do not merely watch it from the outside; we, too, are participants in the story. The question is, which character shall we be—the blind man who received the Light, or the "seeing" ones who chose to remain blind as bats?

Associate Editorial:

What Does the Future Hold?

Jim Mullican

According to some prophets of doom among us, churches of Christ are rushing headlong into apostasy. They continually point to the scattered voices among us who are calling for "change" and who want the church to be a denomination among denominations. They warn constantly of impending division and the inroads of liberalism. Perhaps they are right, and perhaps we need to hear such warnings in order to avoid such dangers.

However, I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet (a young prophet–in–training), as Amos said in Amos 7:14, but I think the doom–and–gloomers are wrong. To date I have visited forty–five states and I have attended worship or Bible class in many of them, often as an ordinary visitor, so that I was able to see things as they normally occur in the life of those particular congregations. What I have seen is not liberalism running rampant, but good and conscientious Christians seeking to save the lost, edify the saved, bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord, help those in need, and worship God as instructed in the New Testament.

> "If the preachers I know and the churches I have visited are anything like a representative sampling, I believe the future of the church is secure."

Yes, we have room to improve. We all need to be more involved in mission work and personal evangelism. Some of us need to be more active and faithful in our personal walk with the Lord. But what else is new? I've been attending the church for forty–five years, and a Christian thirty–nine years, and we faced these same challenges back in the 1950's.

It's possible we might lose some who are dissatisfied with the constraints of the scriptures, but that's nothing new, either (I John 2:19). In more recent times we lost some who wanted instruments and denominational status about 1900, and about 1950 we lost some who did not want to care for the needy as taught in the New Testament. Both groups continue to dwindle.

If the preachers I know and the churches I have visited are anything like a representative sampling, I believe the future of the church is secure. Let's just be sure that each of us does his or her part, and the church as a whole will be what it should be.

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Guest Editorial:

The Gospel According to John

Ron Newberry

The Gospel of John is a simple message which even the least experienced students of the Bible can promptly comprehend. Yet, this same Gospel is at the same time so complex that it can mesmerize senior scholars. As Leon Morris wrote in the opening lines of his commentary on this Gospel, it is like "...a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It is both simple and profound."

Everyone who has read the four Gospels of the New Testament readily recognizes the difference between John's presentation of the Good News and the way the Gospel is presented in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). For example, John's Gospel does not include the transfiguration scene nor the episode in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Any number of good Bible handbooks can point out the various differences between John and the other three Gospels. This would include numerous events recorded by John which are absent in the others, and vice versa).

One explanation for these differences is the purpose for which each writer had for reducing his inspired thoughts into the written word in the first place. It is generally agreed that Matthew recorded his account primarily for a Jewish audience, proving that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Mark drafted his work for a predominantly non–Jewish readership as implied by his various explanations of Jewish customs and translations of Aramaic words, which would have been unfamiliar to Gentiles. Luke's Gospel is the first of two volumes written to Theophilus, who was perhaps a Roman and certainly a Gentile, in which Luke attempts to confirm Theophilus' faith. John composed his Gospel for one specific reason, which he identifies in John 20:30-31, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is theChrist, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John wrote his Gospel recognizing that he had left out many important events in the life of Jesus, but he recorded those that he believed would produce faith in the reader. He set out to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the son of God and that there is life in His name.

As the gospel message moved out from the shelter of a Jewish incubator into a Gentile world, the Good News of Jesus had to be recast so as to communicate to a non–Jewish audience. That didn't mean altering the facts or principles. The story of Jesus was still rooted in Jewish tradition and the ancient text of the Old Testament. John maintained the foundation of Genesis from his opening words, yet varied his approach in order to communicate the facts and explain the principles even to a non–Jewish mind. For example, the fact that Jesus was the "son of David" would have had at best no positive impact on Gentiles They would likely have asked, "David who?" Genealogies, which had profound meaning to the Jews, would have had little importance in relating one to the past and concurrently to God. The term "Messiah" is steeped in Judaism and, therefore, held no importance for Gentiles unfamiliar with Jewish traditions. These and many other tenets rooted in a Jewish heritage had to be translated into meaningful symbols for non–Jews so as to bring them to faith in Jesus.

One of the clearest features of John's

(continued on next page)

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

Thomasville, NC... The *Thomasville Church of Christ* will be hosting a seminar on "Spiritual Maturity" March 1-4, 1998. The seminar will be conducted by Patrick Mead, who preaches for the Madigan Ave. Church of Christ in Morgantown, West Virginia. Brother Mead holds 25-40 seminars annually, writes textbooks and teaches special topics at universities throughout the Midwest. The seminar will focus on various aspects of Christian faith, commitment and morality. For more information call the church office at (336) 472-0335, or contact the church by e-mail at: lifesaver@infoave.net

Roanoke Rapids, NC... The 54th Annual Carolina Lectures will be hosted this year by the Roanoke Rapids Church of Christ, 520 Oakwood Ave., Roanoke Rapids, NC 27870. The lectureship will be conducted in the Holiday Room at the Holiday Inn just off Interstate 95 (Exit 173). This year's theme is "Congregational Development: Back to Basics," and the dates are April 5-9. For more information call the church office at (919) 535-2134.

Yadkinville, NC... The 11th Annual Small Church Workshop will be hosted once again by the Yadkinville Church of Christ May 14-15. The theme this year is "A Prescription For Church Health: Creating a Healthy Environment For Growing Churches." The Small Church Workshop is designed to address the challenges and situations that are unique to small churches with an aim toward helping churches to become more effective.

Gospel is the prologue contained in the first eighteen verses of his book. The prologue is not merely an introduction or a preface to the whole; it is intricately linked to his entire message. He makes a number of assertions in the prologue to which he returns throughout his book as he fleshes out his opening statements. The prologue forms an advance summary of all he will reveal to his readers. In fact, the prologue is the key to unlocking the meaning of the Gospel of John.

John follows a simple formula best captured in the words of wisdom often given to beginning public speakers: "Tell them what you are going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you told them." In the prologue John tells his readers what he is going to tell them. He then tells them. Finally, he tells them what he told them. He sets out to prove Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He presents his evidence. He then draws his conclusion based on that evidence. His point is simple: those who draw the same conclusions based on his evidence can have life in Jesus' name.

The series of articles in this issue of *Carolina Christian* grow out of the prologue of John's Gospel. They focus on various key elements of John's evidence. The articles are designed to follow the threads of John's profound convictions. There is the theme of Jesus as *light* (1:4). John refers to Jesus as *the Word* (1:11, 14). John alludes to believers as *children of God* (1:12-13), God becoming *flesh* (1:14), and seeing the Father through the Son (vs. 1:18). Each article will focus on one specific aspect of John's prologue and follow its development through the Gospel.

As stated above, the prologue is not just an introduction to the Gospel of John; it holds the keys to unlocking John's magnificent message. Our desire is that the readers of this issue of *Carolina Christian* would read carefully each article and then be motivated by them to explore anew the entire Gospel of John so that we might strengthen our faith and have life in the name of Jesus.

Ron Newberry serves the Friendly Ave. Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, 27410.

In the Beginning

Phil Stapp

John sits by a lamp in a small room, wondering how to begin. He looks at the papyrus in front of him filled with memories of his experiences with Jesus. He knows that Matthew, Mark and Luke have already written gospels, but he feels inspired by God to write another. He had seen and heard so much. He wants to share things left out by Matthew, Mark and Luke. "There is so much to tell," he thinks, "but how do I organize it and how should I begin."

The Spirit speaks to him, "Start at the beginning."

"With the birth, like Matthew and Luke?" he asks.

"No! Start at the beginning."

"In the beginning…"

"That's it, go on."

John's mind opens to Genesis. The beginning. When God speaks all of creation into being.

"The Word of God," urges the Spirit.

John begins to understand. There has always been the Word of God. The Word of God as creative force and as the communication of his purpose to his people.

"Jesus was all of this," the Spirit prompts again.

"Yes," John thinks, "Jesus is the Word. Moses wrote about God's creation, I will write about God's new creation. Like Moses I will write about light and life, but it all begins with the Word."

His hand begins to write, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." He continues, writing about light and life and new creation.

"Don't forget the most important part," reminds the Spirit.

"Which part?"

"The Word became flesh. That is your theme."

So John continues writing, guided by the Spirit, telling the good news of the Word become flesh.

> "It is John's assertion that Jesus is God in action in revelation, deliverance and especially in new creation."

The preceding is a product of my imagination. No one knows exactly how the Spirit inspired John in his writing. We do know that the Spirit was at work and he had John write these powerful opening words. Words that have so much background, meaning and importance to the rest of John's gospel.

At times a lot of emphasis has been put upon the ancient Greek philosophical use of "the Word" (or *logos*). While John may have had this in the back of his mind, I believe he purposely rooted his usage in the Old Testament. He does so by using the phrase "in the beginning," a deliberate reference to Genesis 1:1.

"The Word of God" is a powerful force in the Old Testament. This phrase denotes God in action, especially in creation, revelation and deliverance. It is John's assertion that Jesus is God in action in revelation, deliverance and especially in new creation.

In these first few verses of his gospel John is saying that when heaven and earth were created, there was Jesus (the Word), already existing in the closest relationship with God and partaking of the essence of God. This is the one who became flesh. This is the one who is the light. This is the one in whom we should believe so that we may be born again. John is writing about a new creation, so he uses words which recall the first creation. Like the first, the second is not carried out by some subordinate being. It is brought about through the agency of the "Word", the very Word of God. There is continuity with the old creation.

The term "Word" does not reappear in the body of the Gospel with the same sense as it does in these opening verses. Nevertheless, in what they say about the "Word", these verses show us the perspective from which the rest of the Gospel is to be understood: all that is recorded, from the banks of the Jordan to the resurrection appearances, shows how the eternal Word of God became flesh, so that men and women might believe in him and live.

Phil Stapp preaches for the Brewer Rd. Church of Christ, 2010 Brewer Rd., Winston–Salem, NC 27127.

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Jesus the True Light
(John 1:1-18)

David Vaughn

There are many great pieces of literature and we all have our favorites. Even with differences in composition and style, the great authors hold our attention with their abilities to draw us into their stories. Some writers can so vividly describe events which awaken our senses that we can feel the mist from falling water or actually smell the fragrance of the flowers.

The Gospel of John certainly ranks among the great pieces of literature in the world. He enables us to see Jesus by introducing ideas of timelessness, creativity, life, light, darkness, birth, rejection, flesh, preeminence, grace and God as they relate to Jesus. As we look at John's prologue, let us center our thoughts on Jesus as the true light.

The Bible introduces the concept of light in Genesis 1:3, where the reference is to light as contrasted to darkness in the physical realm. The Old Testament often uses light in the figurative sense as an attribute of God: His garment is light (Psalm 104:2); light dwells with Him (Daniel 2:22); and His light means salvation (Psalm 27:1). In the New Testament, John says that God *is* light (I John 1:5). Figuratively, light and life were tied together by the ancients to refer to the sphere of ethical good.

So, what exactly does it mean for Jesus to be the Divine Light? "You light up my life" were the words sung by Debbie Boone many years ago as her song climbed to the top of the musical charts. Some people have the ability to motivate and encourage us to be our best. Serving as examples in attitude and action, they light up our lives. But no one, however, can light up a life like Jesus. Jesus is the premier example.

First, just as light and life are linked together, in Jesus we have access to the ethical life as opposed to darkness and sin. As the authentic light, Jesus exposes the darkness that is in opposition to light (John 3:19). Life and understanding about how to live (light) originated with Christ (John 1:4). He revealed life as God intended for us to live and apart from Him there is no way to that life (John 14:6, "I am the way...").

Second, the light of Jesus is not overpowered by darkness (John 1:5). Darkness can blind us to the light of our Lord's glory, but when we decide to follow the light, the darkness is dispelled. Darkness has control over our actions to the extent that we surrender to the darkness. Jesus, however, has overcome the world of darkness and assures us that faith in Him will give us victory over darkness as well (John 16:33; I John 5:4). Faith in Jesus enables us to become children of light and to live accordingly (John 12:36). And as we follow Christ by walking in His light, loving our brothers and sisters, we avoid being overtaken by the darkness.

Third, Jesus as the Divine Light means that He is the true light. In reference to Jesus, John wrote that He was "the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9). Claims have been made, remedies offered, philosophies presented, and they all have demonstrated their inadequacies in governing the affairs of humanity. Variations of Christianity have been followed, only to leave the adherents empty and disillusioned. True light "is not a possession of man" (Leon Morris), and comes only from Jesus. To reject part of the light is to leave part of life "illuminated" by the light of men; to

(continued on page 14)

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Seeing God Through Jesus.....
(John 1:18)

Amos Allen

A quick read through the Gospel of John shows Jesus in one argument after another concerning his identity. People see the resemblance between him and his Father, but to believe he is God is asking a lot. Faith is a risky business; one can't be too careful.

John records Jesus speaking of his kinship with God in two ways. The first is represented by John 1.18: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Father and Son know each other like no one else does. Jesus is the Only One who can really tell us what God is like. The Father and Son are so alike they that consider themselves to be One. If you've seen one, you've seen the other. This idea is repeated throughout the book.

The second way is mentioned in John 3.35: "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." Whatever they (and we) see Jesus doing is exactly what the Father wanted. In other words, if God had come to earth Himself, He would not have done anything differently than what Jesus did. Of course, God did come and they saw His glory.

The two ways Jesus talks of his relationship are closely linked. The Father and Son know each other intimately, and their actions are the same. Who God is is shown

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(continued from page 12)

depend on light we do not have. John introduced Jesus as the Word that was from the beginning, and that "Word was God." In his first letter John wrote, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). And neither is there any darkness in Jesus.

The fourth truth is that as the Divine Light, Jesus enlightens every man (John 1:9b). There is a general sense in which Jesus gives light to everyone by means of the visible creation (Romans 1:20). However, some people do not want the light of God and when that light is rejected, mankind is blameworthy. The light of Jesus is to be taken to the whole world, enabling them to see the light of salvation and then make a choice as to how they want to live. Our new birth is based on our acceptance of the light.

In John 8:12 Jesus laid claim to being the "light of the world," and His followers "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." This is not a weak, flickering, wavering light, but a strong beam that is superior to all lesser lights, shining through the morass of darkness, allowing the whole world to see the difference between sin and righteousness.

We have had our visions and perceptions of God, but they were immature and incomplete. God's essential being was not revealed until the Word became flesh. Jesus has given us a full account of the Father and told Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). To live in any way which would diminish the light of Jesus is a rejection of the Father. All the promised blessings are summed up in the abundant life Jesus gives. How blessed we are to have the Light!

David Vaughn preaches for the Gastonia Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 1919 North New Hope Rd., Gastonia, NC 28054.

to us in the actions and language of Jesus. He mirrors his Father. We have access to a large amount of information that tells us what God would do (or did) in many different earthly situations. We can know a whole lot about our Father thanks to the Son.

"...He came in a way we could relate to, one in which we could know the depth of His love and desire for us."

What does this have to do with us? Remember, Jesus is revealing the Invisible God, so let's take a run through John's Gospel for a look at what the Father/Son considered important.

Gathering followers to whom he could open heaven was important to Jesus. He needed people who could recognize who he was and share their belief with others. Reading chapters thirteen to seventeen gives an idea of the depth of the relationship between the Twelve and Jesus.

Controlling the natural world (water to wine, feeding the 5,000) and healing people (Lazarus, blind man) are displays of God's power, and is used to make people think. They began to ask who this is and if God is somehow involved.

Interacting with lost, isolated people (Samaritan woman, pool-side invalid) was an ongoing concern for Jesus. Our God does not like for people to be pushed to the fringe and abandoned. He knows what it is like to be ignored and rejected.

Teaching the nature of God (I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd) was important to Jesus. He let people make decisions about him based on what he said. Some saw God in Jesus and believed. Others would never let themselves acknowledge that God might show up looking like this.

Jesus refuted and countered the dysfunctional religion of the Pharisees (misuse of Scripture, abuse of people) in very direct and harsh language. Jesus despised the hypocrisy that kept and turned people away from God. The religious leaders detested Jesus for his popularity and ability to unmask them. Their animosity led to the death of Jesus.

The last character trait is the willingness of Jesus to suffer and die. It was not a helpless, woe-is-me situation. Jesus was in control of himself and died only because he was willing to do so (read 18.1-11). Watching Jesus do what God wanted during the arrest, trial and crucifixion is awe-inspiring.

The Father/Son understands our needs much better than we do, and knows how to meet them. He came because that is exactly what we needed (even if we didn't know it). And He came in a way we could relate to, one in which we could know the depth of His love and desire for us. No longer invisible, no longer out of reach, no longer indescribable. Imagine, God wanted to be known by people like us. If that is what God wants, let us grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amos Allen can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Road, Asheboro, NC 27203.

Children of God: A Living Resemblance

Peter Rode

One day the great Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo happened to overhear a group of people admiring his Pieta, a statue of Christ on His mother's knee after His death on the cross. One man attributed the work to another sculptor, much to the chagrin of Michelangelo, who took particular pride in the Pieta. Returning to the sculpture after dark that evening, Michelangelo carved his name on it so that no similar mistake could occur in the future.

> "So, too, we as children of God have the responsibility of bearing the resemblance of our heavenly Father."

It that was how Michelangelo felt when his workmanship was not recognized, can you imagine how Jesus must have felt when He came to His own and was not recognized for who He was? Even so, he came to earth in the form of a human being so that "those who believed in his name" might be given "the right to become children of God…children…born of God (John 1:12-13). John makes it very clear to the reader that this acceptance as children into the family of God is not something that man can do of himself. The birth is of divine origin. A similar message is given to Nicodemus when he comes to visit Jesus one night. Jesus tells this high–ranking member of the Sanhedrin that if he wants to enter the kingdom of God he needs to "be born again," or "born from above." Jesus clarifies this by restating the sentence and using the words "water and Spirit" (John 3:3-5). Again, it was not to be a natural, or human, birth; rather, it was a birth that involved divine activity—the Holy Spirit. This activity can be seen in the Spirit's conviction of the sinner of "…guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8), and then indwelling him at the point of baptism when sins are washed away by the blood of Christ and he becomes a child of God.

So then, God is involved with the sinner's birth from start to finish. We need to thank God that He did not merely send His Son into the world—whom we would not have recognized because of the darkness in our lives—but that He took the initiative and enabled us to recognize Jesus. We could not have initiated a relationship with God ourselves because of the chasm that sin created between us and God. He was the one who had to build a bridge to span that chasm, and that bridge is Christ. Just as Esther could not approach the king until he summoned her (Esther 4:11), so we had to wait for God to act.

It is those who believe in "His name" that are given the privilege of becoming God's children. The phrase "His name" sums up the character, reputation and essence of God. As the Psalmist says, "Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you" (Psalm 9:10). Once you know who God is, you will surely believe (trust) in Him, and so place your life in this hands. When you do this through baptism, you exercise the right He has given you to become a child of God.

Along with being part of God's family, however, comes responsibility. In a family the children usually bear the resemblance of the parents and the parents expect their children to reflect the norms and standards they embrace. So, too, we as children of God have the responsibility of bearing the resemblance of our heavenly Father. John reminds us of this when he writes, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God" (1 John 4:7). If we are truly the children of the God of love, we will love. This means that we will show concern and support for each other, we will show compassion to and help sinners, and we will be hospitable towards strangers. People who bear a strong family resemblance to God must also bear a resemblance to each other.

Most religions provide their adherents with a way of attaining something in this life. Many think Christianity is a means of obtaining various advantages at the end of life and lump it with all the other religions. But Christianity is different. Christianity offers all the benefits up front, as a gift, as soon as one becomes a member of the family. There is nothing to be earned. Redemption, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, the indwelling Spirit—all these are yours from the first day. All believers are equal members of the family and have equal "rights." We all have access to "every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Living as a member of God's family is not a means of attaining something; rather, it is a grateful reaction to God's love and a means of thanking God for what has already been received. We have compassion for sinners because God had compassion on us. We sacrifice ourselves for others because He sacrificed Himself for us. We feed others and give them drink because He fed us and gave us Living Water. We give good gifts to the "undeserving" because He gave us the greatest gift of all while we were undeserving (which is not to say that we are deserving now). We do all these things, not to seek or earn God's favor, but because we cannot contain our gratitude. In the words of John, "We love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

On the other hand, however, whoever does not love cannot have been born of God. John reports Jesus addressing the Pharisees with the following words, "If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God...he sent me" (John 8:42). They would not accept the truth He was speaking and were hostile to Him. They were filled with hate instead of love, and as a result, Jesus says, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire" (John 8:44). You can recognize a tree by the fruit it yields, and when a person does not display love or obedience to God, there cannot have been a transformation, which comes with the indwelling Spirit. "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21).

We have two options, and only two. We can exercise our right as believers to become children of God—and so be born to a life of love, peace, joy, hope and harmony— or we can reject Jesus and remain children of the devil and live without love, joy, peace, hope and harmony. What's it going to be? The choice is yours.

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at the church address at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Seven Habits of Highly United Congregations...

Mark Hudson

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul deals with Christian unity. From this chapter we can learn various characteristics, traits, or habits that must be evident within a congregation if unity is to flourish. Congregational unity happens when there is...

1. **A Serious Commitment to Unity**. Paul says we are to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Unfortunately, we too often are haphazard about unity. Unity is not optional. It is not of secondary importance. We cannot choose between doctrinal purity and unity. A congregation lacking unity is lacking doctrinal purity. Congregations at peace stress the importance of unity.

2. **Forbearance of One Another in Love**. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1,2). Forbearance is the fine art of "putting up with other". Each of us has quirks and faults that test the patience of others. As we want others to forbear our shortcomings, so we must be forbearing.

3. **Participation in the Work of Service**. Busy church members don't have time to fight among themselves. God placed the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). The work of service eliminates strife and builds teamwork.

4. **Growth in the Knowledge of Christ**. The equipping of the saints continues "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Christ–likeness cannot happen without a knowledge Him. Understanding and imitating Christ promotes oneness.

5. **Love in All Speech**. Part of the adventure of growing up in Christ is learning to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Paul said it this way in Ephesians 4:29, "Let no unwholesomeword proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." How many church splits started and ended with words spoken in anger? Using love in all words promotes congregation unity.

6. **Value Given to Every Member**. We loose sight of the fact that every member of the church is important. In Ephesians 4:16, Paul speaks of the working of each individual part. Every joint supplies something. Highly united congregations value each member whether young or old, new or experienced, strong or weak.

7. **Kindness and Forgiveness**. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:16). Like human families, the family of God requires kindness to oil the sticky spots and forgiveness to hone the rough edges. Kindness and forgiveness should be the rule, not the exception. Kindness and forgiveness should be offered to the degree God has forgiveness us in Christ. That's a big order, but it's absolutely essential if congregations are to be united.

While these habits are required for congregational unity, they must be practiced by individuals. The manner of life necessary for habitual unity begins with you and me.

Mark Hudson preaches for the Aiken Church of Christ, 2006 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803.

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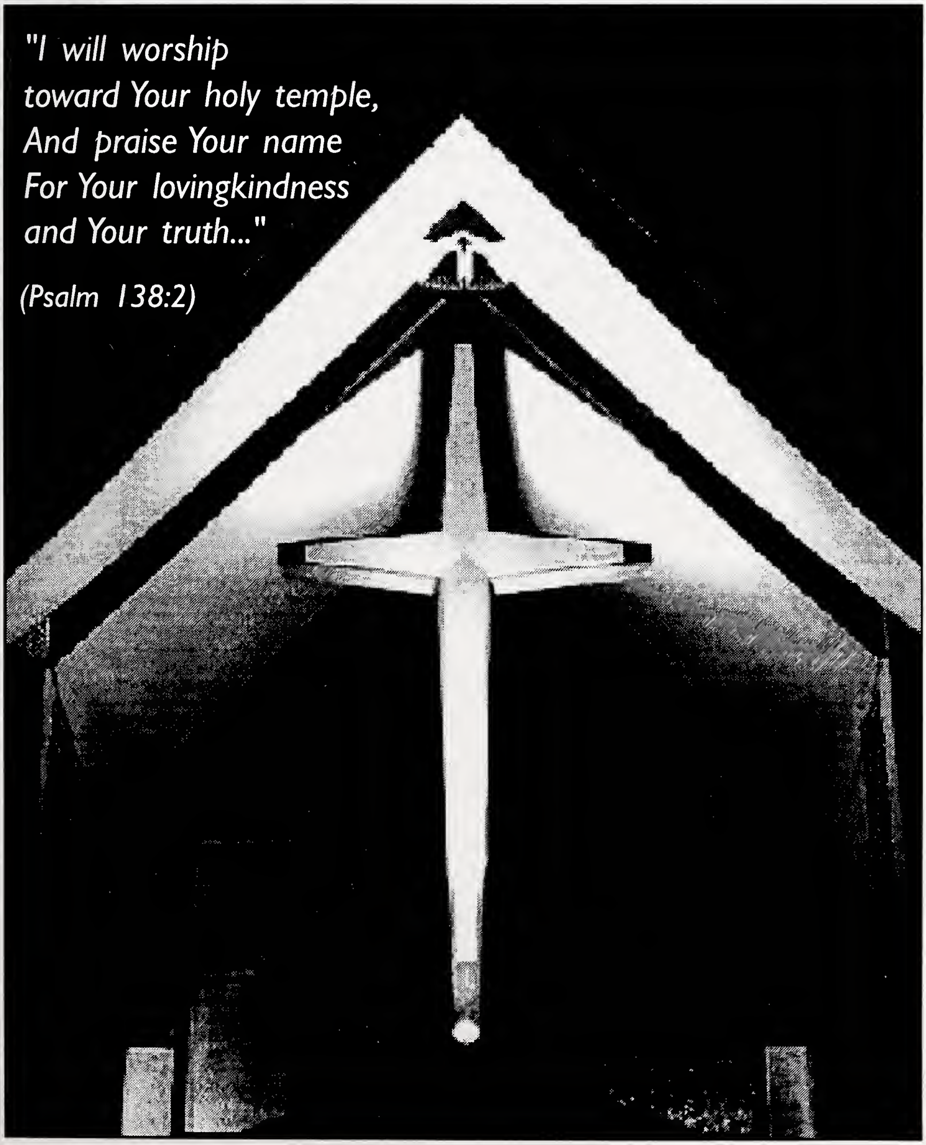

*"I will worship
toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness
and Your truth..."*

(Psalm 138:2)

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The Beginning of the Gospel...

DENNIS CONNER

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." No frills. No details. No lengthy introduction. Mark opens his work by getting straight to the point, announcing something of world–changing significance: the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The gospel ministry of Jesus marked the initiation of a new society in the world—the kingdom of God. Indeed, the first recorded words of Jesus in Mark's story are these, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15).

Leading up to the beginning of Jesus' gospel ministry are two significant events: His baptism and the testing in the wilderness. As Mark sees it, both of these events are crucial in Jesus' preparation for His ministry and also speak to the would–be disciple of the requirements of kingdom life.

The Commitment

"It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" (Mark 1:9-11)

Mark's account of Jesus' baptism is characteristically brief, noting simply that the coming up from the water is greeted by a coming down from above. As Jesus comes up He sees the heavens torn open, revealing the descending Holy Spirit. In this way He is divinely anointed for His kingdom mission. Then there is the voice of God, expressing the solidarity of the Father with the Son. The Holy Spirit gave Jesus power for His ministry, and the Father voiced His approval.

There is an element of irony in the baptism in that One who came to be understood as sinless should submit to a rite directly related to repentance and forgiveness of sins! Why? Perhaps that is the question Mark wants us to ask. What is the meaning of Jesus' baptism?

First, its meaning can be connected to the approval of the Father and may be viewed as an act of ordination and commission. The voice from heaven, expressing the divine pleasure, confirms the qualification of the Son to carry out the Father's work. In the moment of baptism God anoints Jesus for this world–changing mission by sending down the Holy Spirit. The baptism was a decisive act for the initiation of Christ's kingdom ministry.

Second, the baptism expresses Jesus' desire to be obedient to the will of God. By submitting to baptism Jesus was demonstrating his submission and obedience to the Father. Mark may be thinking along the same lines as Matthew, who says that Jesus did it in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Thus, Jesus' ministry begins with His commitment to be obedient to His Father's will.

And third, in this act we see Christ identifying with sinful humanity. By submitting to baptism He associates Himself with sinners and casts His lot among the ranks of the guilty. He would obey God, even if it meant being numbered among the transgressors.

The Testing

Jesus' commitment to the will of God and identification with sinful humanity immediately involved Him in a fierce spiritual battle. Mark continues by saying, "And immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him" (1:12-13). The wilderness temptation was the natural consequence of His baptism and was likewise inseparably linked to the initiation of Christ's gospel ministry.

Mark says that the Spirit "drove" Jesus into the wilderness to face Satan. It is not that the Lord was unwilling to go; rather, Mark intends to convey a sense of urgency about the confrontation between the Prince of Peace and the prince of darkness. Mark's mention of the wild beasts is unique, perhaps emphasizing the loneliness and isolation that surrounded the ordeal until finally it was over and the angels would minister to Jesus.

Unlike the accounts in Matthew and Luke, Mark says nothing about the content of the temptations. Again, his concern is not "what" but "why." He is only concerned with meaning. Will Jesus be faithful to His calling? Will He be true to the will of God? Of course, this was not the only time Jesus would be confronted by Satan. Part of the significance of the wilderness temptations is that they mark the beginning of a struggle between good and evil that would be carried on throughout Jesus' entire ministry. As Wendell Willis has correctly observed, "The first sign of Sonship is struggle, thus predicting His mission. Just as Jesus' coming intensified God's attack on evil, so in response to His coming, the forces of evil intensified their attack."

So, in the face of evil's onslaught, would Jesus be faithful to God? The answer that is implied in Mark's account is a triumphant "Yes!" There in the wilderness, isolated and alone, Jesus met the general of the armies of darkness, and Jesus won! He was true to the will of His Father and was faithful to His calling. In the wilderness Jesus' obedience to God was affirmed. As Mark sees it, this victory over evil was a major step in establishing and introducing the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Implications For Discipleship

And what does all of this say to those afterwards who would seek to enter the kingdom?

First, *following Jesus in kingdom living will not be an easy task.* When undertaken as it should be, the life of discipleship to Jesus is a costly life, bringing us into daily confrontations with evil. For Jesus the wilderness was a place of evil confrontation and a proving ground for obedience. For us, the world is our wilderness and is no less a place of evil confrontation. Each day we are called upon to die to self as we reaffirm our faithfulness and obedience to the will of God in the wilderness of the world. Costly commitment to doing the will of God, whether it is comfortable or not, is the stuff of genuine kingdom life.

Also, *we may view our own baptism as a decisive act of obedience and initiation.* For us, baptism is a clear statement of our own intentions to follow the way of God. It is the dividing line between the old life of sin and new life in the kingdom (Romans 6:6), evidencing the power of the gospel. The culmination of our faith in baptism is for us as well a kind of commission to the ministry of the gospel in the kingdom of God, and in that act of faith God provides us with the power of His Spirit that is necessary for carrying out the mission.

Conclusion

While Mark speaks of the beginning of the gospel, he nowhere suggests that it had an end. As a matter of fact, he leaves the gospel mission open–ended. The resurrection of Christ provides new impetus and power to the apostles and early disciples to continue His ministry, taking the good news to all the world. And the mission continues with the church today. God commissions us to carry on the gospel ministry that was initiated by Christ, going forth in the Father's approval and power, leading people into His eternal kingdom.

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Associate Editorial:

Why We Are Christians

Jim Mullican

Most who read this article will be Christians—people who believe in Jesus as the Son of God and who have confessed that faith and have been baptized for the forgiveness of sins. For those who believe the Bible, there is little room for disagreement as to how one is saved from sin (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21).

The area of disagreement seems to be in connection with what we are to do after becoming Christians. Some feel that once a person becomes a Christian, he has fulfilled his responsibility. Others indicate by their actions that a Christian should attend worship services occasionally when they can find nothing else to do. Still others know they should attend whenever possible and they look forward the opportunity. They can usually be found assembled on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights.

Of course, the serious Christian recognizes that we have responsibilities regarding our own personal conduct, our concern for the needs of others, and our concern for the welfare of the church as a whole. We have a responsibility to reshape our lives and priorities according to the example of Jesus (Philippians 2:5ff; I Peter 2:21).

In the four gospel accounts, the way in which we see Jesus spending the majority of his time and effort was teaching the word of God; proclaiming the good news of salvation to those who were lost. Since we are to follow in His steps, we too should be constantly concerned with teaching the gospel to those with whom we come into contact. Notice the emphasis laid on this responsibility in the New Testament:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, ***that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"*** (I Peter 2:9, emphasis mine, JM). See also I Peter 3:15, Matthew 28:19-20, and I Corinthians 9:16.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2).

As a grapevine is to bear grapes and a fig tree figs, so our purpose in life as Christians is to produce more Christians. Let us keep that purpose for our existence before us at all times.

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the eXpress Files:
A Column For Youth...
May I Call You Father?

Kylie Powell

How many names does God have? Plenty. Books are published that list the different names by which God is called. Each title allows us to associate certain wonderful qualities with God, such as "Almighty" and "Holy One." One name that sums up many of God's characteristics is "Father." To some people this may be one of those "old faithful" terms used in prayers, sermons and songs, but it really isn't a name to be used lightly.

> "God does not stop caring when we mess up."

One of the great characteristics of God as Father is His love. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God" (I John 3:1). Earthly parents may feel affection for other children, but for their own there is a special emotion. The love that God the Father pours down is special for His own children. This forms an intimate relationship between God and believers. Just think for a moment; you are not just an invention created to robotically worship and serve, but an actual child of God!

Just like the parent who still loves you after you dented the car or received low grades on your report card, God does not stop caring when we mess up. Consequences may have to be paid when parents find out about the car or the report card, but they still care. God the Father reacts the same way when His children make mistakes, and we do. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Our imperfection does not mean God loves us any less. In fact, God holds our hand and comforts us when we are facing the consequences of our unwise actions. Paul reassured us of this when he said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles..." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Not only does God the Father love us always and comfort us in times of trouble, but He is also very dependable. Though parents try their best to be there for their children, they haveresponsibilities and problems, too. God does not have a bad day at work, nor is He too busy to listen to our praises and requests. He is there anytime day or night to listen to a prayer and answer it according to His will.

Knowing that God is the Father who always has time for His children leaves us with no excuse for failing to form a close relationship with Him. The words of the song *May I Call You Father?* portray the dependence of God's children upon their Father: "I've hurt You with my sin. Father, please forgive me. I'm young and can't survive without the peace of mind that only You provide."

The intimate relationship that God establishes with His children provides the love and comfort that everyone needs. All He expects from His children is that they grow in this relationship by loving, serving and relying on Him.

Can you call God your Father?

Kylie is a member of the church in Hendersonville, NC and is a senior at West Henderson High School. You may contact her at 63 Beechwood Dr., Horse Shoe, NC 28742, or e-mail her at kpow@juno.com.

Seek and You Will Find

Tim Sensing

Gone! Although she remembered placing the coin with the others, it was now gone. No trace and no clue. She quickly lit her lamp, swept the house and searched carefully. Eureka! She found her coin and rejoiced. Relief and satisfaction filled her heart. God, likewise, seeks after you.

> "...How do we handle losses that are beyond our control, yet leave us devastated? How do we recover from the losses that are caused by our own irresponsibility or neglect?"

All of us have lost things around the house. Car keys, shoes, cordless phones. Your memory fixes the image of the item in the exact location you left it. It's not there. You search. You shove other things out of the way. You go back again and again to the original place you first imagined. Sometimes items can be lost for only minutes and the rush of bewilderment vanishes quickly. Sometimes months, sometimes forever, and the memory of the loss fades into the background.

Judy traveled the same road home from the office every day. As she turned the corner two blockfrom home, clouds of smoke warned her of danger. The fire trucks had finished packing their gear and were ready to leave the scene. Judy's home, family heirlooms and photos, her stamp collection and business records, and her sense of security and warmth perished in the flames.

Joel loved his new job in the city. Friendships between co–workers flourished. Opportunities for advancement were plentiful and existed without the usual atmosphere of politics and competition. Joel gazed out his window, satisfied with his life. Two weeks later Joel discovered an accounting error involving a client's portfolio. Carefully switching some names and numbers, Joel cast the blame down the hall. It didn't work. Joel got caught. With his integrity and reputation lost, Joel resigned.

Lincoln woke up early Friday morning to begin his weekend of adventure. Within hours he sat in his deer stand covered with camouflage and scent. For Lincoln, the hunt was not nearly as important as the solitude his weekly trips provided. After drifting in and out of sleep, Lincoln jolted from his perch. A little girl's laughter surprised him. "How dangerous," he thought. As he listened closely to the girl at play, he recognized the tune she was singing to her baby dolls. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see." Lincoln wondered how long it had been since he had heard that song. The deep sense of loss overwhelmed his soul.

In the days of Moses, before Israel took possession of the land, Moses spoke the Word of the Lord to the people. He warned them about forsaking their relationship with God in search of other gods. He warned them that the land they were about to possess would be lost. "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. For the Lord your God is a merciful God, he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath" (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

In a distant time but not too distant place, Jeremiah spoke to the grandchildren of Israel about their pending loss prophesied by Moses. "When the seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity" (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

How do any of us overcome life's losses? How do we handle losses that are beyond our control, yet leave us devastated? How do we recover from the losses that are caused by our own irresponsibility or neglect? How do we find ourselves when lost within our own souls?

The answer? Seek the Lord and live. The Lord is near and is seeking after you.

Tim Sensing can be contacted at 649 Barr Rd., Lexington, SC 29072.

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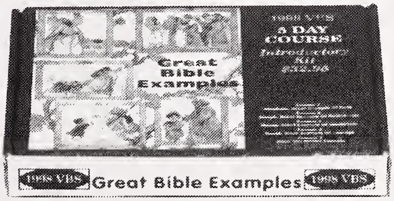

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Pay Attention

Stephen J. Mathis

“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding...Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Romans 14:19; Philippians 4:8 NRSV).

My wife and I had the opportunity to go driving in the snow two weeks before Thanksgiving. I wanted to prove my skill in driving. Beth wanted to prove that the snow could not keep her inside. Half way through our adventure, we switched drivers. Before she pulled out onto the messy streets, we reviewed the first rule of driving in the snow, which is to pay attention. And she did just that, keeping her eyes on the road.

> “One reason for this shallow, fault finding parody of Biblical faith is because we have taken our eyes off Jesus.”

Our life of faith is similar to driving in icy conditions. It is easy to get off track, easy to end up in the ditch. There are lots of icy patches on the road that we can’t even see till we hit them. And, on top of that, there are lots of crazy drivers out there!

So what’s the first rule in the drive of faith? Pay attention. Pay attention to Christ. When Paul seeks to settle the conflict in the church at Philippi, he emphasizes this rule. He writes, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 2:5), and “More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). Paying attention to Christ requires two things.

First, we need to focus on knowing Christ, counting everything else as loss. This means cultivating a relationship, spending time alone with Him, intentionally and daily. We cannot do this just once a week in our Sunday best. It requires a daily devotion. Our worship together on Sunday will never have life and meaning until we live each day as disciples, paying the price for faith, which is the sacrifice of self.

Second, paying attention to Christ means accepting our brothers and sisters. Our relationship with Christ takes place in a community of faith. For too long we have been conditioned to find fault with others, when Paul tells us to seek those things that accomplish peace with others and that build others up. One reason for this shallow, fault finding parody of Biblical faith is because we have taken our eyes off Jesus. Sometimes we're so busy pointing out error that we miss the mark of Christ in others.

Biblical faith calls for us to pay attention to Christ not only in our lives, but in the hearts and lives of others. We have to keep our focus on the right place. When we are focused on Jesus, we will recognize His presence in others.

God calls us to accept one another, to dwell on what is true, honorable, and praiseworthy in others. Again, this is not something we can do once a week in five minute increments. It must be intentional. It will require time. Remember, we have not been called to find fault, but to extend grace. This is how we bring glory to the Father (Romans 15:7).

Pay attention to Christ living in you. Pay attention to Christ working in others. Keep your eyes on the cross. Pay attention.

Stephen J. Mathis formerly lived in Charlotte, NC, before moving to work with the Schenectady Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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Who Can I Forgive Today?

MARK HUDSON

Against the backdrop of David's rise to power, there is an amazing story of kindness and forgiveness. After David defeated Goliath, King Saul became David's worst nightmare. Even though David was a close friend to Saul's son Jonathan, the king tried repeatedly to kill him. David was forced to live on the run as a fugitive. Eventually, Saul and most of his sons (including Jonathan) were killed in battle.

David became ruler of the southern part of the kingdom. Ish–bosheth, Saul's surviving son, ruled the northern part until he was murdered. After many years of suffering by the hand of Saul, David was finally able to consolidate his rule over all of Israel.

David began to make his mark on this reunited nation. He established his throne in Jerusalem. After one failed attempt, he brought the Ark of the Covenant safely to the new capital city. He defeated the Philistines and other enemies. As his reign reached its zenith, David made an unusual request: "Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Samuel 9:1).

Years after the death of Saul and Jonathan, David sought out descendants of Saul to "show the kindness of God." Such overt kindness was unheard of. Such active forgiveness was unthinkable. In the world's eyes, descendants of Saul posed a threat to David and should be destroyed. By human reasoning, David owed nothing except retribution to any relative of Saul.

> *"We should be active, like David, in seeking out those to forgive."*

A grandson of Saul was found in the search. Mephibosheth was the crippled son of Jonathan. He was five when news came about the death of his father and grandfather. In the rush to flee, a nurse carrying him fell. Mephibosheth was injured and became lame in both feet. Now years later, David found him to show kindness. He restored to Mephibosheth all of Saul's land, and he invited Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table.

This is a wonderful story of love. We should be active, like David, in seeking out those to forgive. Don't wait for others to come asking forgiveness. Wake up each morning and ask, "Who can I forgive today?" "But," you may say, "it was easier for David because he did it for Jonathan's sake." True! Fortunately, it is easier for us to show kindness to others for Christ's sake.

"And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Mark Hudson, who preaches for the church on Whiskey Rd. in Aiken, SC, can be contacted at 1071 Kismet Dr. in Aiken, 29803.

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The True Impact of the Original Sin

PAUL JARRETT

The words "original sin" are associated in most peoples' minds with the belief that we are born with the guilt of Adam's sin. In rejecting this doctrine we have tended to ignore the impact of Adam's original sin. While no one will be condemned on the basis of anyone's sin other than their own (Ezekiel 28:20), it would be a mistake to conclude that the first sin has no impact on us.

When David wrote the following words he was not referring to being under condemnation for Adam's sin, but his words are descriptive of the conditions into which we are all born as a result of Adam's sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my Mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). While it is certainly the case that death (separation from God) results from our own sins, it is equally true that the conditions exist as a result of the first sin contribute to the fact that we all sin (Romans 5:12).

Two things are true as a result of the original sin. First, we are all living in a world in which sin, and as a result the temptation to sin, abounds. Second, we are all weak in the flesh and, therefore, are subject to temptation. We can, and should, resist temptation, overcoming sin through the power of God's Spirit and the counsel of His word (Romans 8:11; I John 4:4). However, while we can say "no" to temptation, it still remains that as a result of the original sin we cannot escape being tempted. Furthermore, we would seem to have very little control over what does tempt us.

The more I hear and read about the possibility of genetic explanations for alcoholism, homosexuality, and even (as one article I came across suggested) divorce, the more I am convinced that the human race was damaged by the original sin. If I can concede that some people have hotter tempers than others, then why should I doubt that as individuals we may each be predisposed to certain temptations?

We could spend hours debating the nature vs. nurture issue. However, when all is said on the topic, the truth is that whether it was present at birth or shaped soon after the child is born, we are still faced with the reality that all of us battle the temptation to sin.

Some heterosexuals have stronger sex drives than others, so why should we be surprised that some will struggle with homosexual temptations? The fact that these struggles have gone on for as long as the person who experiences them remembers may be viewed as evidence of the true impact of the original sin. The fact that a person may have to struggle with a bad temper, a penchant for alcohol, or a sexual temptation for as long as they can remember does not justify their yielding to temptation. Nor does it mean they should be condemned just because they are tempted.

I would suggest to you that the true impact of the original sin is that we will all be tempted. The fact that we are tempted does not in itself make us sinners. We become sinners only when we yield to those temptations and commit our own sin (James 1:13-16).

Let us acknowledge the fact that we are all tempted, though often in different ways. Let us refrain from casting stones at the one whose temptations are different from our own. Let us refuse to yield to the rationalization that just because we now have a propensity to sin it is thus all right to yield to temptation. Rather, let us do all that is within our power to encourage one another in our fight against our common enemy.

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

Noah's Curse

J. T. Wheeler

“*And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.*

So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.’

And he said, ‘Blessed by the Lord, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant’ ” (Genesis 9:20-27).

Here is one of the great mysteries of the Bible. This passage has caused consternation in the minds of many commentators and scholars. That Noah, one of the Bible's great heroes of faith, would be so vividly described as a drunk is the first striking thing. That he would be upset that Ham simply reported his situation to the other sons is also a wonder. And finally, that Noah would curse his own grandson for the fault of Ham is amazing. Unless we wish to conclude that Noah went insane (and such cannot be, for he is reported as knowing whathappened to him), there is obviously more to this account than is first evident.

First, let us clear up an obvious misuse of this passage. This scripture is used by many to justify racism against those of African descent. It is true that Ham means “burnt” in Hebrew and that he apparently is the ancestor of the African peoples. However, the curse falls specifically on Canaan, and not Ham. Any attempt to use these verses to support racism is an exercise in distortion and ignorance.

Now to the questions. Why would the Bible want to tell such a story on Noah? The Bible is very honest with its characters. It does not involve itself with vain hero–worship. It treats all its subjects as the real people they were—the good with their problems and even the bad with their good side, if there was any to report.

Still, there seems to be more to the story than this. In just another few chapters God is going to give the land (or inheritance) of Canaan to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12-22). Later, the descendants of Canaan are going to be exterminated by God's order (Psalm 78:55). This story offers part of the explanation as to why God will do such. The point is, most sons become no better than their fathers. With Ham and Canaan having taken such a course as to bring on a curse in the name of the Lord, the understanding is that their children will fare no better and therefore suffer the consequences.

The obvious point of the account is parental respect, which God has always demanded. Ham did not show it; the other sons did. Beyond that, there is the inference that something was done to Noah while he was naked and drunk, something so terrible that Ham's son becomes the specific object of the curse. It was probably that as Ham went and reported Noah's condition, either as ridicule or contempt, Canaan then went into the tent and acted in a perverse fashion on Noah's person. That the Canaanites would later be known for their sexual perversions is an established fact. This seems to make the most sense for understanding what happened in this dark time in Noah's life.

And what is the conclusion of all this for the Christian today? To coin a phrase, "much in every way."

First, God kept His word. The Canaanites, having endured the slavery of the nations, are now no more.

Second, God is just. The sins of the children, in this case "twice as much sons of hell" as their fathers, merited the disastrous future God meted out.

Third, honor your father and mother. If Ham had just held onto a proper sense of honor and love for his father at that weak moment in Noah's life, untold centuries of harm would very probably have been avoided. And the honoring of mother and father is still the first command with promise (Ephesians 6:1-3).

And in the fourth place, look at how our actions and their consequences can be magnified in our descendants. It was not so much Noah's curse that brought down Canaan's family as it was Noah's desire to contain the evil he knew was ahead because of Ham's actions. How all we fathers need to learn this lesson. Keep yourself pure (I Timothy 5:22).

At this point some would lay all the blame at Noah' feet. I would advise against that, for Noah was not credited with fault by the Holy Spirit, though he did help illustrate the problem of alcohol even in what was supposed to be a private context. We just don't know the particulars surrounding Noah's actions. Leave them to God.

Finally, whatever curse might remain from past sins, ours or others, the remedy is in the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). Spread the word!

J. T. Wheeler preaches for the Westside church in Charlotte, NC. He can be contacted at 4463 Millbridge Dr., Charlotte, NC 28208.

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The Father and His Children

JONI WALLS

When little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:13-14).

We all understand that God is our Father, but I wonder how well we understand what it means to be His children? Until recently I had taken the Father/child relationship with God for granted. The truth is, I preferred to think of God as some distant Creator and all–powerful being. Yes, I knew in my head that He was also my Father and that He loved me so much He sacrificed His only begotten Son so that I might have salvation. Yeah, yeah…I knew He was my Father, but I did not have a close relationship with Him. To me, God was more like a step–father that I kept at arm's length. I thanked Him for the love He had shown me and the gifts He had given me, but I didn't open my heart to Him and let Him be the Father to me that He wanted to be. I never really recognized myself as *His* child.

Well, thankfully, I'm over that phase of my Christianity now. I now see God—the same all–powerful, all–knowing, ever–present Creator of all things—as my loving, giving, and merciful Father. With that truth also comes the realization that I am His child.

I'm not married and I don't have children, so the full understanding of all that is involved in a parent/child relationship still escapes me. I only know one half of it. However, I do have two nieces and a nephew, and by spending time with them I can experience a small—very small—part of being a parent. I love how God has created earthly relationships that He then uses to teach us about our relationship with Him!

As I watch my two–and–a–half year old niece, Kayla, she sometimes curls her lower lip in the pout position, her little body going rigid with rebellion and a big, emphatic "No!" escaping her usually sweet mouth when she doesn't want to do what Mom or Dad, or even Aunt Joni, has asked her to do. And then I find myself wondering, "What was Jesus thinking when He said the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these? Surely He doesn't want someone like that…someone in the midst of 'the terrible twos'! Wouldn't He prefer solid, mature, calm adults?"

Matthew 18:1-4 explains what Jesus was alluding to when He said the kingdom of heaven belongs to such children: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child and had him stand among them. And He said, 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' "

What was the child–like quality Jesus was looking for? Humility. Knowing that God is *far* greater than us and that we have no right to approach Him, we go before Him with very humble hearts. That's how we approach the throne of God—with humility like a child, with humility that expects nothing from anyone other than God because He is our ultimate provider.

In our society today, how many humble children do you see? How many screaming, tantrum–throwing kids in the grocery store aisles? How many "I want it all for Christmas" kids do you see? Humility seems to be in short supply these days.

Let's go back to that rebellious, pouty child for a moment. Can you imagine the expression on God's face as He peers down at me from heaven in one of my "terrible twos" rebellions? What do you see on that holy face? Anger? Frustration? A wrathful face eager to throw me into the depths of Hell for my temper tantrum?

Are you kidding? What does Kayla see on the faces of her parents, or her Aunt Joni, when she is pouting? Okay, she does see a degree of sternness because discipline is necessary. But, even more, she sees someone who loves her and is trying not to laugh with loving indulgence at how cute she looks as she is trying to assert her independence. I mean, how do you keep a straight face when a two–year–old, hands planted firmly on her hips and using all the grown–up sounding words she can remember, says, "No, I probably don't need to take a bath! I'm not dirty…maybe" (that's her new grown–up word lately, "maybe").

Are we laughing cruelly, with the intent of making fun at her? No, it's gentle amusement, a tender smile of love. See, we know that we have three options here. One, we can pick her up and *make* her take a bath. Two, we can withhold a reward—like a bedtime story or playtime—until she gives in and consents to take a bath. Or three, we can just let her go and, when she discovers that being dirty is uncomfortable (or "nasty," as she would say), she will be asking for a bath!

In the first two choices Kayla is either forcefully taken to the bath or bribed to take a bath. Either way, in the end, she has been humbled. The third choice, waiting until she has recognized the wisdom of her parents and comes to take the bath herself, exhibits a greater humility. (Remind you of a certain prodigal son that Jesus talks about?)

But do you think Kayla will be so cute to those who love her when she's in the middle of a rebellion at age 13 as she was at age two–and–a–half? Why do you think Jesus said to be like *little* children in both of these passages? Does this seem backwards to you? This is why God doesn't want us to act like adults when we come to Him. Adults would rather wallow in their misery and dirt than humble themselves before God and admit that He was right the entire time! As adults, we become too intellectual, too proud, and too arrogant to submit to someone else. It's part of our culture today, this "Stand up for yourself because no one else will" philosophy.

What does it mean to be like a child with God? Well, what is Kayla's world like? Does she go around trying to "stand up for herself" all the time? Does she walk out of the house and tell her parents that she can handle life on her own, commanding them to "leave me alone?" No way! This little girl is looking for her parents' approval in almost every action she takes. "Look, Mommy. I colored the whole floor blue. Isn't it pretty?" "Look, Aunt Joni, I put lipstick on!" "Yaay, Daddy's home!" she cries with uncontrollable excitement and arms flailing with anticipation. Does she do everything right all the time? Of course not. She makes mistakes and has her moments of rebellion, but her *main* focus is to please Mom and Dad so she can fully receive the benefit of their love.

And that's all that God wants from us. He wants us to be like little children, doing what we can to try to please Him, seeking His love, looking for His approval, humbly admitting that He is God and He is right. And being excited about spending time with Him.

Are we going to make mistakes? Sure. Are we going to have moments of rebellion when our Father wants us to do something we don't want to do? Yes.

And what does He do when that happens? He could force us, picking us up and putting us into that bathtub whether we want to go or not, but He doesn't. He could withhold a reward or deliver a consequence for disobedience in order to help us change our minds and hearts—which sometimes He does. Or, He might let us go our own rebellious way until we realize that we don't want the filth of the world on us any more and it's time to return to the purity and safety of His love. As His children, that's what we should do. We might make mistakes or get off track, but we can always return because His arms are always open.

Is there a danger that we might not ever return to Him? That we might continue in our rebellion until we lose sight of the Father's love completely? Yes, there is that danger, but it's a risk that God is willing to take because He would rather have us come to Him in the free exercise of love than force. But even when we are in that state of rebellion and are turning away from Him, our Father doesn't stop loving us. He doesn't close His arms and say, "Well, that's it. Even if you were to leave the pigsty and return to me, I wouldn't take you in." No, He is a loving and forgiving Father.

So, act like a little child. Stay within His arms' reach. Humble yourself before your loving Father and seek to please Him. The irony is that *spiritual* adults are like children to God. Be a child of God. Act like a child of your Father.

Joni Walls can be contacted at 111 Nottingham Circle, Cary, NC 27511.

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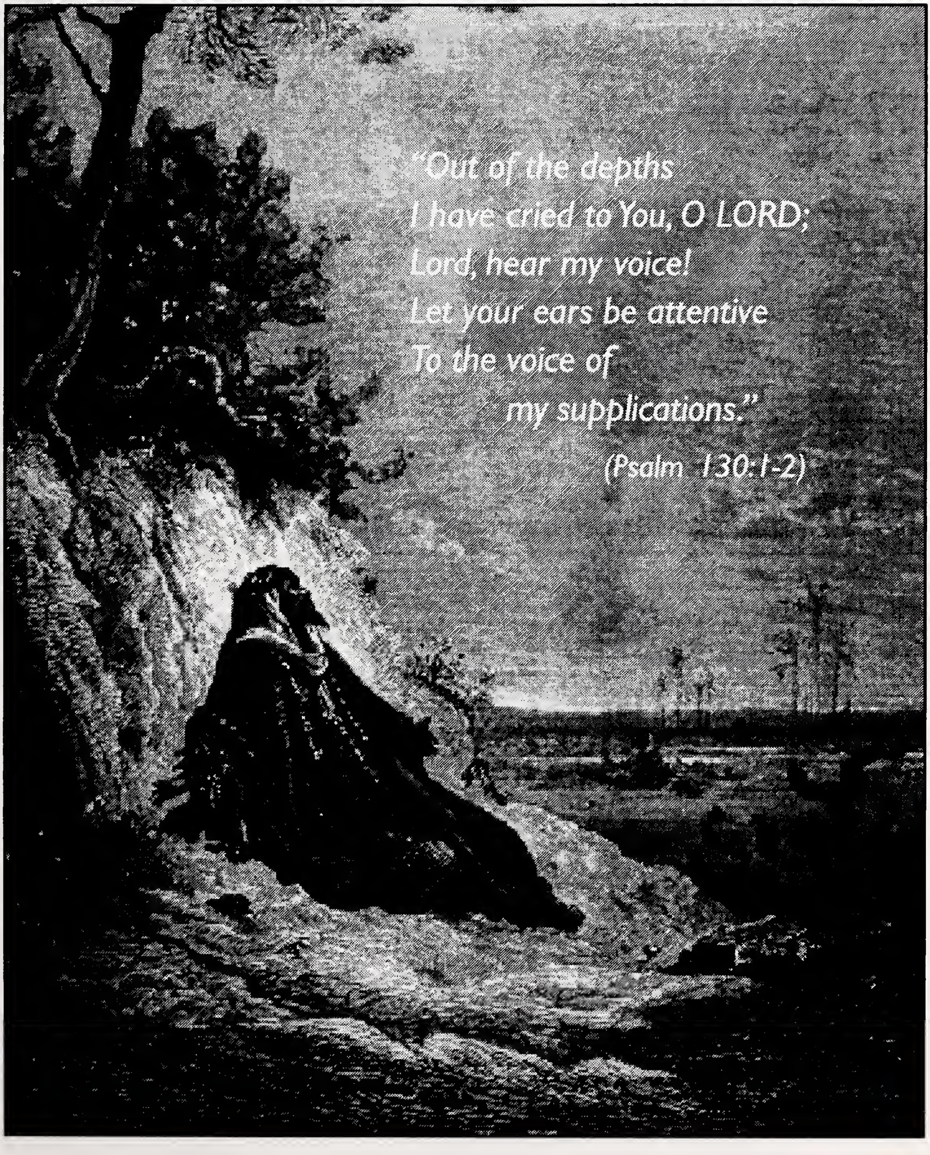

"Out of the depths
I have cried to You, O LORD;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
To the voice of
my supplications."
(Psalm 130:1-2)

CAROLINA christian

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Jonesboro

Dennis Conner

It was March 24 and no one at the school, or in the town of Jonesboro, AR, could possibly have seen it coming. At the sound of the fire alarm students and teachers began to go through the motions of a drill they were all familiar with. Most of the kids likely welcomed the drill, for it would mean a few minutes of freedom from the classroom. But as they innocently and unsuspectingly filed out of the building, they were greeted with a firestorm of bullets. In a matter of moments the psyche of an entire community was forever altered as five people, four of them children, lay dead or dying and eleven others were wounded.

And who could possibly be responsible for such a surrealistically mindless act? Some crazed madman trying to win the attention of the world for a moment? Some blank–conscienced sociopath? None of these. Then who were the shooters? Children. Two boys, one eleven years old and the other thirteen. Incredible. Impossible. But true.

In the aftermath a shocked nation, a grief–stricken town, and sixteen shattered families were left with the inevitable question of " Why?" Why and how could such a despicable act happen? And why did God let it? These are the kinds of questions to which there are no simple answers; yet, at the risk of seeming presumptuous, we will try here to offer some suggestions.

First, why did it happen? The motives of the two boys aside, it happened because we live in a fallen, sin–filled world. For all the denials of the experts, the sociologists, the psychologists, the sophisticates, and the unbelievers, the fact remains that sin is an ever–present reality. Scoff at it if you like. Make jokes about it. Explain it away and redefine it if you will. Still, there is no escaping its deadly consequences or its pervasive hold on mankind. When sin entered into human experience everything changed. Everything. The way we treat God, the way we treat each other, the way the world treats us. Not even the physical creation itself was left unaffected. Because of sin our world is flawed, scarred, and full of mindless injustice. Jonesboro provides more than ample testimony to that truth.

People then ask, "Why did God stand by and let such a thing happen?" Once more we are brought face to face with the age old issue of the problem of evil. I do not for a moment profess to understand all the ways and methods of God. Frankly, I don't think that I would really want a God who could be comprehended fully by my limited mind. There is, however, one thing that I do know. I do know that God has not stood idly by and helplessly watched as evil triumphs time and time again. He has already given us His answer to the sin, evil, and injustice that pervades our existence. He has done something to deal with the problem. His response can be found in the hills of ancient Palestine.

God's first response to the problem can be found in the cross of Jesus.

In the cross God declares His own suffering. His suffering? Yes, His suffering. Are we so wrapped up in our own experience that we have completely lost sight of the fact that God Himself suffers? He created man and man responded with pride and rebellion. He blessed man over and over, and over and over we took those blessings and behaved like the nine lepers healed by Jesus who did not return to give praise and thanks. The Father loved His children, and His children spurned that love.

Collective mankind has continually and persistently broken the heart of God since our history began. And yet, God sacrificed *His* Son so that we could be right with Him once again. And as the Son hung there suspended between heaven and earth for those six hours on that sin–darkened day, do you for a moment think that the Father watched without feeling? If we could offer a word of comfort to those distraught families in Jonesboro, it would be this: "God knows what it means to suffer." When the Lord says, "I feel your pain," it is no empty election slogan; it is the truth.

Further, the suffering of the cross was infinitely unjust. Petty men with puny power and small–minded ambitions could simply not tolerate the perceived threat of the poor preacher from Galilee. They lied about Him, slandered Him, trumped up charges against Him, tried Him illegally, and then they killed Him. Though Jesus had done absolutely nothing wrong, He died as the most common and hated of criminals. The Just One for the unjust ones. The Godly for the ungodly. Holy God for unholy humanity. The Innocent killed for the sake of the guilty. Yes, from the human perspective, the cross was the ultimate injustice.

God's second response to evil is an empty tomb.

The resurrection of Jesus is heaven's declaration of victory over all sin and evil. Evil might have won the battle, but it lost the war. *"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?...But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* The resurrection is more than a symbolic myth, as some view it. Rather, it is the historical act of God in response to the real issues of sin and evil in the human condition. Through the resurrection of Christ we hear the very voice of God resonating through the intervening centuries, and that voice proclaims, *"Death is swallowed up in victory!"* It is the voice of hope.

To those who would deny these spiritual realities and who would mock the Christian faith—to those who are content only to raise questions without offering any answers—I would pose this question: What would you tell the shattered families in Jonesboro? I thought so.

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Jonesboro Church Devastated by Shooting

three of the victims of the shooting at the Westside Middle School were members of the Bono Church of Christ in Jonesboro, AR. Shannon Wright, the school teacher who was killed as she deliberately put herself in the line of fire to protect one of her students, leaves behind her husband and two year old son. Lynette Thetford, the other teacher who was shot, is the wife of one of the elders of the Bono church. She underwent successful surgery for her wounds and is reported to be doing well in her recovery at this time. Candice Porter is one of the students who was injured. She also underwent successful surgery and was able to go home two days after the shooting. Candice attends the Bono church with her parents.

Karen Curtner, the principal of Westside Middle School, is a 1983 graduate of Harding University and is also a member of the church.

Shannon Wright's bravery drew national media attention, including a feature on NBC's award winning program *Dateline* on Friday, March 27. It was reported that she spotted the boys in the woods after several shots had already been fired and saw that a rifle was aimed at one of her students. She pushed the child behind her, shielding the child from danger. Shannon was struck by two bullets and died later that evening following surgery.

Memorials can be sent to the Bono Church of Christ, PO Box 129, Bono, AR 72416. The phone number for the church is (870) 932-9019. E–mail messages can be sent to Benny Baker, the minister, at *jbbake@mail.cel.net*.

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Associate Editorial:

By Whose Standard?

Jim Mullican

An interesting advertisement appeared some years ago in one of the religious journals. Advertising a new line of communion cups, it stressed that these "hold the proper amount of juice," unlike others that are either too small or too large. I remember wondering as I read that claim what standard had been used to determine "the proper amount." Of course, from what is said in the Scriptures and from what we know about common practice, it would appear that Jesus and the disciples each had ordinary drinking cups when they gathered for the Passover, at which time He instituted the supper by which to commemorate His death. Those cups were probably larger than any we generally use today, but since God didn't specify a size, He must have regarded that as unimportant.

The ad reflects a problem which is all too common among Christians today. Some have been known to complain about too many songs, not enough songs, the sermon being too long, meeting times being too early or too late, and other such things. In such cases, the standard is always "what I like" or "what I'm accustomed to." In reality, these are all areas of opinion where sound judgment should be exercised.

The only standard by which we are bound is the New Testament. If the New Testament doesn't authorize something it matters not that 99% of the churches accept it. It is still wrong. Likewise, if the New Testament teaches something that is to be done, it doesn't matter that most of the prominent preachers oppose it.

In John 12:48 the Lord said, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day," and in Matthew 7:21-23 He charged, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.' " From these texts it is plain that the standard by which we will be judged is the word of God, the New Testament. Let's always be sure that's the only standard we follow.

Brotherhood News

— Mike Mobley

MORGANTON, NC...
The Morganton Church of Christ will be hosting a Ladies Day on May 30, 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The theme is "Bloom Where You Are Planted: Coping in the 21st Century." The speakers will be *Mary Scott* of Oak Ridge, TN, and *Mary Thigpen* of Greenville, SC. For more information call the church office at (828) 433-0478.

GREENSBORO, NC...
The Friendly Ave. church will be celebrating its 30th anniversary with a Homecoming on July 12. The theme of the celebration will be "Glorify Thy Name."

MOCKSVILLE, NC...
Staff and campers can now register for Carolina Bible Camp via the internet. The Carolina Bible Camp & Retreat

(continued on page 10)

Lessons From Two Sisters

RITA WATSON

There are three incidents recorded in Scripture that tell us about the sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Interestingly enough, two of the incidents revolve around a meal and hold some important lessons for us regarding faith.

The first meal happens at the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry (Luke 10:38ff). Jesus and His disciples are invited to Martha's for a meal. Martha is very busy in preparation for the occasion. She is also quite comfortable with Jesus. So comfortable, in fact, that she is willing to walk into a room full of men and chastise the Teacher for not sending Mary back to the kitchen where she belongs! Martha is a bold woman!

The Lord's response was to tell Martha not to be distracted by many things. Perhaps she was worried about putting on a fancy meal for the Lord instead of just getting the food on the table. Jesus tells her that few things are needful; or only one, really. Mary is thirsting for spiritual food and it will not be taken from her. Spiritual food is more important than physical food.

In the second incident, which takes place between the two meals, we get a glimpse of the trusting faith of Martha. In John 11 Lazarus has died and Martha runs to meet the approaching Jesus. She expresses her complete trust in Christ when she says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." It is interesting to note that for all of Mary's knowledge, her faith in Jesus did not seem to go as far as Martha's. Mary, too, said "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died," but that's where she stopped.

And then the third incident, and the second meal, happens six days before Passover (John 12:1ff). The set up is almost identical to the first meal, only this time they are in the home of Simon the leper. Martha again is serving, Lazarus is again reclining with the men, and Mary is again at the Master's feet. This time, however, Mary is not just listening. She is anointing his feet with a very expensive ointment and wiping them with her hair. In this incident we see Mary's faith at work. She had listened when Jesus taught and she understood what even the chosen twelve have not understood. Jesus is going to die! And He is going to die soon!

In the meantime Martha has learned her lesson well. This time she says nothing about Mary being in the dining room instead of the kitchen (maybe she even paid for the ointment). And Mary has learned what Martha knew, that Jesus could do anything. Even die for our sins.

As for myself, I have learned three valuable lessons from these sisters. One, that all women are created equal, but not the same. Some are given talents to serve the body and some to serve the mind. And sometimes it is those who seem weakest in spiritual knowledge that show the most profound trust in the Lord.

Two, don't be distracted by so many things. The distraction of many things can keep us from the Lord and the needful things of this life and the life to come. Simplify.

And finally, pay attention to what is going on around you. You might be surprised at what you learn. Just because Martha was busy serving didn't mean she wasn't listening. She heard and saw enough to know that the Father and Jesus were tight. She knew enough to know that Jesus was the Messiah and in Him she could put all her trust.

Rita Watson lives at 903 Oak St., Marion, NC 28752.

Out of the Heart

JOHNNY MELTON

On Tuesday, March 24, two children, dressed in camouflage from head to toe, ambushed their middle school classmates killing four of them and a teacher. Eleven others were wounded: ten students and another teacher. Since last fall, there have been at least four shootings in public schools: in Pearl, Mississippi, in Paducah, Kentucky, in Stamps, Arkansas, and now in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Parents and school officials along with law enforcement officials seem stunned and bewildered over this outbreak of shootings.

While some may be surprised by these episodes of violence, others have been anticipating them. Consider the following gleaned from the January 1994 edition of the *Focus on the Family Newsletter*. "*U.S. News and World Report* estimated that more than 3 million crimes a year are committed in or near the 85,000 U.S. public schools. A University of Michigan study reports that 9 percent of eighth-graders carry a gun, knife or club to school at least once every day. Twenty percent of suburban high schoolers, surveyed by Tulane University, thought it was appropriate to shoot someone 'who has stolen something from you.' ***Eight percent believed it is all right to shoot a person who had 'done something to offend or insult you.'*** One authority said a juvenile Armageddon may be approaching."

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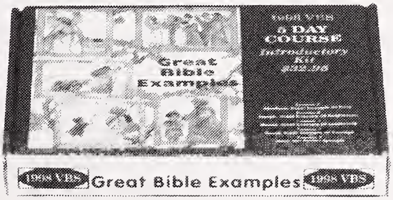

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Some media pundits are blaming these violent outbreaks on "southern culture" with its affinity for hunting and fascination with guns, as though hunting and gun ownership don't exist in other regions of the country. The problem doesn't lie with the availability of guns. Guns have been in homes in this country for generations and we haven't been subjected to this kind of violence. The problem lies in the moral relativism that pervades not just southern culture, but our national culture as well. When adults in a society decide that moral decisions may be determined by individuals based on his or her personal values, how can we not expect the children in that society to do likewise?

Our laws are rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic that has the Ten Commandments at its core. The last five of those commandments seem to move from the concrete ("You shall not murder") to the abstract ("You shall not covet..."). That is significant. The more abstract a moral precept is, the easier it is to violate, and the more one must guard one's heart in order to keep it. Jesus warned, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

Solomon wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). When one compromises one's heart with what society may call "little sins"—coveting, lying, and now even committing adultery—there is little to restrain one from committing what society tends to view as greater sins—stealing and committing murder. And that is especially true when we are dealing with the immaturity of children.

Jeremiah knew what he was talking about when he lamented, "I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). But that is precisely what we moderns have concluded: we don't need God or the Bible to direct our steps, we can find our own way, thank you very much. Until we abandon that foolish notion and conform our lives to the moral and ethical standards set out in Scripture, we can expect outbreaks of violence to continue, as the moral fabric of our society disintegrates.

Johnny Melton, a former editor of ***Carolina Christian****, preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, Mississippi. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 651, West Point, MS 39773.*

Brotherhood News

— MIKE MOBLEY

(continued from page 7)

Center homepage can be located at *http://users.aol.com/cbiblecamp/cbchome/htm.* There is also a links page, address book, photo album page, directions to the camp, and weekly registration information.

YADKINVILLE, NC... The Yadkinville Church of Christ will be hosting its 11th annual Small Church Workshop May 14-15. The theme is "Prescriptions For Church Health: Healthy Churches Are Growing Churches." The workshop is designed to address the needs and challenges that are peculiar to smaller churches. For more information call the church office at (336) 679-8924.

Brotherhood News

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK... *James O. Baird*, well–known Christian educator, preacher, and publisher, died Feb. 5, 1998, of complications from a stroke. Baird was the publisher of *The Christian Chronicle* from 1981-1993 and was former president (1954-74) and chancellor (1974-90) of Oklahoma Christian University. He oversaw the growth of the school from a junior college to a four–year institution. Baird lectured and preached around the world and was the author of two books. He is survived by his wife, Avanelle, five children, 14 grandchildren and two great–grandchildren. He was 78.

MALIBU, CA... Another great soldier of the cross, *M. Norvel Young*, died Feb. 17, 1998, at the age of 82 after suffering a heart attack at his home. Young was the third president of Pepperdine University, beginning his career there as a professor of history in 1938. During his tenure the school grew from a small college of 950 students to a nationally recognized university of five schools and 9,500 students. He was also co–founder of Lubbock Christian College in 1956. Young was also a prolific author, co–founding, editing and publishing two popular magazines among churches of Christ, *20th Century Christian* and *Power For Today*. He is survived by his wife, Helen, four children and 10 grandchildren.

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Treasures Old and New

Paul Jarrett

Some of the greatest battles being waged in churches today are being fought between Athenians and Pharisees. The Athenians are those who are always looking for and promoting "something new" (Acts 17:21). The Pharisees, on the other hand, are thoroughly convinced that "the old is good enough" (Luke 5:39). The Athenians assail the Pharisees for their inability to receive "new wine" (Luke 5:36-38). On the other hand the Pharisees challenge the Athenians to "ask for the old paths...and walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16).

If the church is to avoid being torn asunder by this conflict, we must reject as the extremists they are, both Athenians and Pharisees. We must determine to behave like the scribe Jesus commended when He said:

"Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things NEW and OLD (Matthew 13:32; emphasis mine, PJ).

The Scriptures disapprove of those who reject ancient truths in their pursuit of new things. However, they also condemn those who refuse new insights because of a blind allegiance to past practices. The faithful disciple follows Paul's exhortation to "examine carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:21).

Whether old or new, we should ask two questions regarding everything we see or hear. First, we should ask, "Is it biblical?" Does it violate any principle of Scripture? Second, we should ask "is it helpful." Will it help advance the cause of Christ in the world? These two questions are far more important than whether something is old or new. These two questions can help us to find treasures new and old.

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

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A Message True and Clear

Peter Rode

There is an unusual account of how the news of the battle of Waterloo reached England.The word was carried first by sailing ship to the southern coast. From there it was to be relayed by signal flags to London.When the report was received at Winchester, the flags on the cathedral began to spell it out: "Wellington defeated..." Before the message could be completed, however, a heavy fog moved in. Gloom filled the hearts of the people as the fragmentary news spread throughout the surrounding countryside.

> "...The mist that had clouded their understanding was slowly lifted. Jesus had not been defeated."

It seems to me, from reading about the reaction of the apostles, that's the message they got after Jesus was arrested, crucified and buried. Matthew tells us that, "...the disciples deserted him and fled" (Matthew 27:56). Only John, and Peter at a distance, followed Jesus to the High Priest's palace where Peter ended up disowning His Lord three times. Even after the resurrection they weren't sure what had happened.The apostles did not believe the report the women brought them from the empty tomb because "...their words seemed to them like nonsense" (Luke 24:11). Peter, after seeing the empty tomb firsthand, "...went away, wondering to himself what had happened" (Luke 24:12). It was only John who believed when he saw the empty tomb; however, none of them understood the teachings of the scriptures on this point (John 20:8-9).

Back in England, the mists began to lift and it became evident that the signals from Winchester Cathedral had really spelled out this altogether different, triumphant message: "Wellington defeated...the enemy!"

So too, in Jerusalem, the message that had at first been incorrectly perceived as defeat was finally sinking in. It took a walk, a long conversation, and a meal with the risen Lord before the two who lived in Emmaus began to understand (Matthew 24:13-35).Thomas wasn't the only "doubter" among them. It took a personal visit from Jesus after His resurrection to persuade them all that He had been victorious over death (Matthew 24:36-49).The mist that had clouded their understanding was slowly lifted. Jesus had not been defeated. Instead, He had defeated the enemy—death!

We are in the enviable position of living two thousand years after the event and have thescriptures to tell us that Jesus is alive! We have the full message, so we can rejoice knowing with certainty that our Savior lives, and that because He defeated death we too will be triumphant! Let's make sure that we don't allow any mist to distort the message of the Gospel as we communicate it to others through our words and deeds.

Keep the faith!

Peter Rode, a native of South Africa, ministers to the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

the eXpress Files:
A Column For Youth...
If You Had the Chance

Danny Boggs

When David was anointed to be the next king of Israel, he didn't rush to take hold of the royal privilege and power. Instead, he became a servant to the current king, Saul. David soothed the troubled heart of Saul with the sweet sounds of his harp, carried the king's armor, and never hesitated to call himself Saul's servant, or to call Saul his king, lord or father. In loyalty to the king and to his God, David led Israel in the defeat of its enemies.

Saul loved having such a dedicated servant, until he heard how much everyone else loved David, too. After David killed Goliath and Saul heard the people singing a song that praised David more highly than himself, "from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David," (I Samuel 18:9).

Twice while David was playing the harp for him, Saul hurled his spear at David. David became a fugitive and Saul initiated a bloodthirsty and relentless pursuit of his elusive servant. David told his best friend, Jonathan, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death," (I Samuel 20:3).

Once, when David was hiding from the king, Saul unknowingly entered the cave where David and his men were hiding. The men told David that God was giving him his chance to do with Saul as he wished. They were wanting David to get even. Instead, David eased up behind the king as he slept and secretly cut off a corner of his robe. Though David could have killed his tormentor, his conscience struck him for merely cutting the king's robe. "He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord,' " (I Samuel 24:6). Saul learned what happened and temporarily curtailed his tenacious pursuit of David.

It wasn't long before Saul was back at it again, nor before David had another chance to stop the madness. Saul and his elite army went to the Desert of Ziph to search for David. David and Abishai snuck into Saul's camp and found him sleeping. Abishai was poised to thrust his spear through the king and pin him to the ground. "But David said to Abishai, 'Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?...The Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go,' " (I Samuel 26:9, 11). Once again David had spared Saul, and once again Saul took a breather from chasing David.

Though Saul never did catch David, the king still counted him as an enemy the rest of his days (I Samuel 18:29). On the other hand, when David heard that Saul and Jonathan were dead, he put to death the man who claimed to have killed Saul and he wrote a mournful ode to the late king (2Samuel 1).

Now, when David had the chance, what stopped him from murdering the madman who wanted to destroy his life and prevent his rise to the throne? It wasn't the fear of getting caught or of disappointing others, because the Israelites loved David and looked forward to him being their king.

So what was the reason he didn't kill Saul when he had the chance? It was because David's heart belonged to God. He wasn't waiting for an opportunity to knock Saul off because he had already let God kill that desire in his heart.

Sometimes the only reason we don't act on our own ungodly desires is that we don't

(continued on page 17)

What Tongues Are For

Ron Newberry

In his book *Come Before Winter,* Charles Swindoll tells the story of what happened to one of the daughters of some friends in Texas. The little girl was constantly on the move, rarely winding down before late at night. The routine had grown familiar. There was the obligatory bedtime story followed by a drink of water, then a prayer. She had to have her doll and another drink, a hug, a kiss, and a third drink. Of course, that was followed by a trip to the bathroom, a very stern warning, and another kiss. Everyone with small children knows the drill.

One evening her dad went patiently through the entire routine until she finally drifted off to sleep. He quietly slipped out of her room, sighed with relief and made his way to his easy chair by the fireplace. He slumped comfortably into his chair, preparing to relax, when he heard a bloodcurdling scream from his daughter's room. Dashing to her room, throwing open the door, he found her sitting on the side of the bed sobbing with big tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What's wrong? What happened?"

"I burnt my tongue!"

That didn't compute, so Dad tried again. "You what?"

"I burnt my *tongue*!" she yelled.

"How in the world did you do that?" he asked.

"I licked my night–light."

Swindoll notes, "Rude was her awakening to the fact that lights are strictly for lighting, not licking. And tongues are made for tasting, not testing. You and I realize that the best thing our little friend could have done was to stay in bed, keep her tongue to herself and allow the light to fulfill its appointed function."

> *"...there is a time to be silent as well as a time to speak."*

I agree! Sticking one's tongue where it does not belong can get us into serious trouble. How many problems could be avoided at work, in families, and in the church if we learned to keep our tongues to ourselves?

The wise writer of Ecclesiastes 3:7 says that there is a time to be silent as well as a time to speak. Paul might help s to appreciate both the time to speak and the time to be silent if we took seriously Ephesians 4:29-32, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Indeed, we would be well advised to take care of how we use our tongues...lest we get burned.

Ron Newberry serves the Friendly Ave. church of Chrsit, 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

An Affirmation of Faith

Tim Sensing

We walk into a crowded assembly week after week, wishing that this time something would be different. We gather in obligation fearing that this week will be as stale as all the weeks before. We sit down dressed for the routine and mundane motions. We utter the songs of faith, listen to the prayers of believers, and break the bread in isolation and loneliness. Our thoughts wander by chasing endless distractions. The fidgety youngster, yesterday's argument, and tomorrow's uncertainty crowd the divine and holy presence of God.

> "In the midst of our faith, fears and doubt, we continue to proclaim 'Amen.'"

We leave quickly, hoping the preacher will not track us down. We leave thinking that either we missed something that everybody else got, or that maybe they are pretending too. We leave doubting God's care, God's presence, and God's love. We leave hurting more afterwards than before, not knowing whether to feel shame or hate for the way we are inside.

"But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No.' For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not 'Yes' and 'No,' but in him it has always been 'Yes.' For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:18-22).

We are to gather glorifying our Father as His people. We are to come expecting a Word from the Lord. We participate proclaiming Jesus' death and resurrection until He comes again. We anticipate receiving comfort and renewal from the presence of the Holy Spirit. We come in faith. *"And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."* In the midst of our faith, fears and doubt, we continue to proclaim "Amen."

*"**Amen,** a Hebrew word meaning certainty, truthfulness, and faithfulness. Both the OT and the NT use it as a liturgical response at the end of Psalms and doxologies in which the congregation affirms what has been prayed by saying Amen, 'So be it.' In the Gospels Jesus often prefaces his teachings with 'Amen I say to you,' a solemn affirmation which the RSV translates 'Truly I say to you' "* (**Harper's Bible Dictionary**). For the congregational amen see 2 Corinthians 14:16.

God is faithful. All of God's promises are "yes" in Christ Jesus. The witness of God's promises is testified by the Holy Spirit dwelling inside each of our hearts who, in agreement with our spirit, affirms the love and grace of God through Jesus Christ.

And God enables us to stand.

Tim Sensing can be contacted at 649 Barr Rd., Lexington, SC 29072.

Life Is Not Fair

AMOS ALLEN

"The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." (Psalm 97:1-2)

"The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." (Psalm 103:6)

Life is not fair.

When we wife was pregnant with our children, she experienced a lot of physical discomfort. Labor pains and delivery were not pleasant to watch or to experience (or so she told me). It was not fair for Anne to suffer due to Eve's rebellion.

And, obviously, it was not fair that Jesus had to die as He did because of my rebellion, and yours. Thinking of that, I also realize that at times life is not fair to my advantage. For instance, I was born in a part of the world, into a family, and to a lifestyle that offers many advantages. For that I am thankful. But what about all those who were born into poverty through no fault of their own? What about all the unfairness in the world?

I watch Jesus. He healed some. He helped others. He taught a few. What was the Creator of the universe doing about all the other wrongs in His world? I don't understand Him completely, but it appears He simply went about doing good, making life a bit more fair for those who had gotten a raw deal. He didn't always straighten out everything for those He helped, but He did give them a chance to rejoin and contribute to their society. He did give them hope.

When people are unfair to others, they push them to the fringe. It's distressing to realize that the majority or the powerful are denying you opportunities that others receive. It hurts to be left out. Fringe people are the unwanted, the suffering. I meet three times a week with a Hispanic fourth grader. She has trouble learning, is bothered by some physical problems and lives in two cultures that do not understand each other and are often suspicious of one another. For her life is not fair. Eventually she will likely drop out of school and act as stupid as people tell her she is. But because of God I get a chance to do something about that. I have the blessing of a merciful Father to bring a little justice to her world.

I have an idea that God gets a lot of pleasure watching people (like you) offer comfort, hope and encouragement to those who know how hard life can be. We are called as Christians to help make life a little more fair for people whenever and wherever we can.

"*...Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never–failing stream*" (Amos 5:24).

Amos Allen preaches for the Meadowbrook Rd. church in Asheboro. He can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

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have the chance to do so without suffering some embarrassing consequences. But what would happen if you did have the chance? If circumstances are all that keep you from acting on sinful desires, then someday Satan will "fix" the circumstances. Give God your heart now!

Danny Boggs serves the Hendersonville church and can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791. We encourage our readers to submit articles to be published in this column. Are you a youth worker with an idea or thought you would like to share? Or are you a teen who would like submit an article from a teen's perspective? If so, you can send your article to Danny at the same address.

Ask Good Questions

J. Stephen Mathis

Asking good questions is the first step in growth and learning, but it is often difficult to do. I faced this dilemma after our first snowfall in New York. I was anxious to get out on the road, to prove my skills as a driver. Because it had been so long since I had last driven in the snow, I needed to ask some questions: Do I need snow tires for my car? What do I need to know about driving in the snow? How can I avoid dangerous New York drivers, uh, I mean, dangerous situations?

From time to time I am reminded of the need to question my life of faith. Honest, searching questions encourage growth and development, helping us to recognize inactive, status quo comfort disguised as genuine faith. I have to ask continuously if I have given my life over to Christ. He is not satisfied with just a portion of my soul. He wants the whole thing. He is waiting for me to sing the fourth verse, "Higher than the highest heaven, Deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, Thy love at last has conquered, 'None of self, and all of Thee.' "

To be faithful to God, to grow in our relationship with Him, we need to ask good questions. Here are some for you to consider:

☐ What are the barriers to increased discipleship?
☐ Am I satisfied with my faith, or am I willing to grow?
☐ How have I quenched the Spirit's work in my life?
☐ Am I able to hear and recognize the Lord's voice?
☐ Is my heart focused on Christ?
☐ How have I taken God for granted?
☐ What barriers have I placed between myself and God?
☐ Is my life open to God's discipleship and grace?
☐ Have I relied on religious experience rather than Christ?
☐ Am I more committed to tradition than I am to Christ?
☐ Which traditions do I hold dear? Why?
☐ Do my traditions nurture my relationship to Christ or impede it?
☐ Am I using my spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ?
☐ What would I give up for the sake of my brothers and sisters in Christ? Money? Time? Worship style? Comfort level?
☐ Am I looking for what is good in other believers?
☐ Have I made it my goal to prove others wrong?
☐ Am I able to recognize the faith of those who are outside the lines I have drawn?
☐ Do I give other believers the benefit of the doubt when we disagree on matters of opinion, practice and doctrine?
☐ Have I extended grace, understanding and forgiveness?
☐ Am I willing to pay the price of working towards the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

Open yourself up to the searching questions of the Lord. Allow Him to work in your heart and soul, leading you forward in the walk of faith. Ask good questions. Renew your commitment to Christ. Put your confidence in Him. Open your life to His discipline and grace. He will lead you safely through the daily journey of faith.

Stephen J. Mathis formerly lived in Charlotte, NC, before moving to work with the Schenectady Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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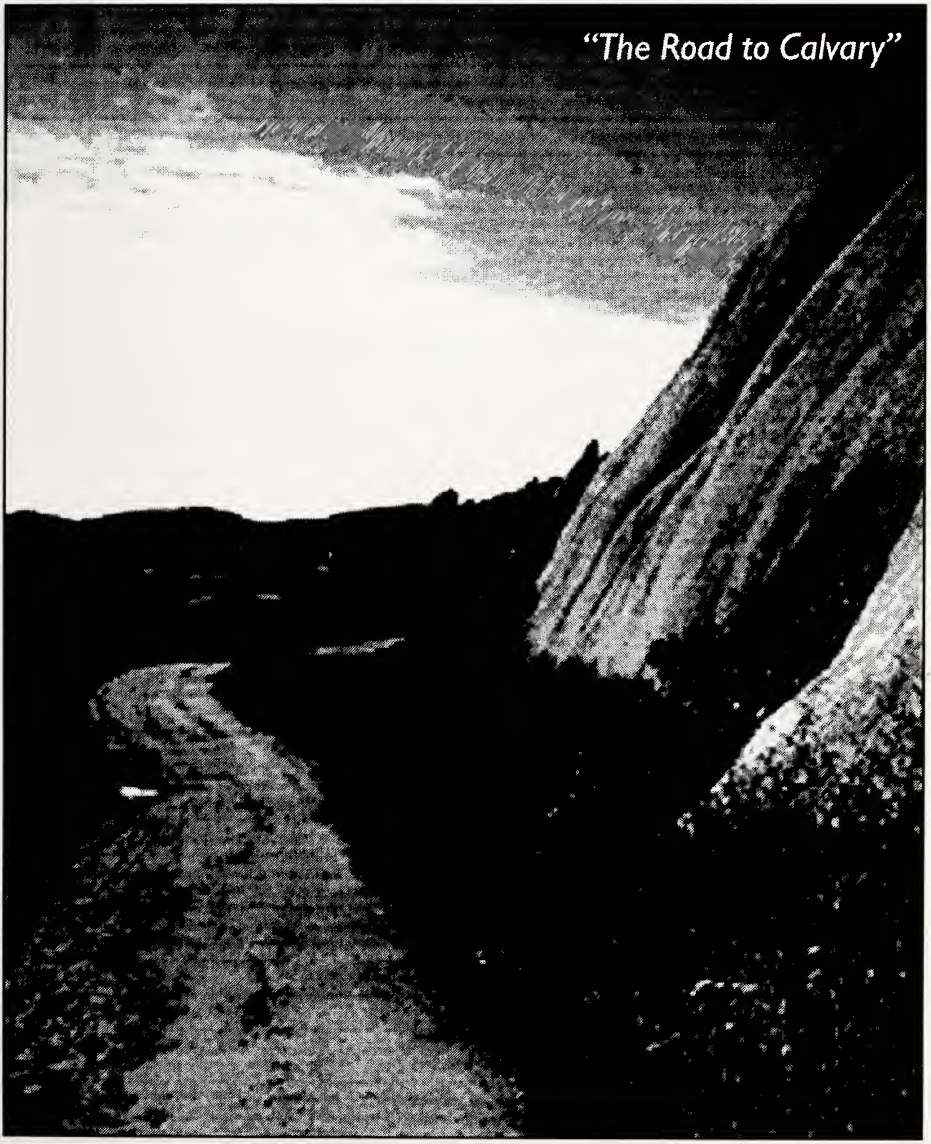

"The Road to Calvary"

CAROLINA
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Editorial:

Who Commends You?

Dennis Conner

A sister in the Lord commented the other day, "I bet it's hard for preachers to listen to other preachers." Well, no, it isn't hard for us preachers to listen to others preach. It's just that it's hard for us to listen to other preachers without being critical, and that was precisely what I confessed to my sister. I know it is true in my case, and I suspect it is true with most of us who preach. Most preachers will tell you that they would rather address an audience of atheists than an audience of preachers. When it comes to those of us who preach, it is too easy for us to be critical, envious, judgmental and suspicious. It is too easy for us to compare other men to ourselves.

> *"To glory in the Lord is to measure ourselves and others against the standards of grace and mercy."*

During his lifetime the apostle Paul paid the price that many men of God have had to pay: jealous rivals, slander, innuendo, unwarranted criticism, shabby treatment, suspicion and rejection. He sometimes suffered mercilessly at the hands of his own "Christian" brothers. And yet, he never succumbed to the pressure to respond in kind, nor did surrender to despair.

Among the Corinthians believers there was a small group of bitter rivals who were determined to completely discredit Paul and undermine his relationship with the Corinthian church. They criticized him, questioned his motives, minimized his abilities, and generally sought to assassinate his character. Consequently, their efforts affected how the Corinthians viewed Paul and also posed a real threat to the quality of the fellowship at Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 10:12-18 we find a portion of Paul's response to his critics. It is a rebuke that is strong, but not mean–spirited, and in that rebuke we are forced to take a long, hard look at our own attitudes and how they affect relationships. Paul writes, "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us... But 'he who glories, let him glory in the Lord.' For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:12-13a, 17-18). The rebuke takes the form of a contrast between two standards of commendation.

First, there is the false standard of self–commendation (v. 12). A great human tendency, and failing, is the desire to make ourselves look more important to other people, so we boast of our accomplishments, our understanding, and the failings of others. We make ourselves the measure of true spirituality. And we make ourselves look good at the expense of others. The critics in Corinth used a measure of their own making as the criteria for commendation and approval; they used themselves.

Divisions and strife have occurred in churches and in the larger fellowship when those using themselves as the standard of approval have castigated and judged those who did not measure up. To make ourselves the standard of approval fosters an arrogance that ultimately undermines any real sense of brotherhood and leaves untold casualties strewn all along the wayside. As Paul put it in a gem of an understatement, those who make themselves the standard of approval "are not wise."

On the other hand, the true basis for commendation is the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 17). We have two options available to us: we can glory in Christ or we can glory in self. To glory in self results in a false sense of security, and in reality is born of a deep–rooted insecurity. When we measure our lives and our righteousness against Christ's, however, a far more accurate evaluation emerges. AsMichael Duduit has observed, "When I measure my pettiness against His greatness, my disobedience against His faithfulness, my self–concern against His compassion, I understand that I simply do not measure up." Thus, glorying in the Lord is the true measurement of both ourselves and others, removing any basis for self–glorying.

To glory in the Lord is to measure ourselves and others against the standards of grace and mercy. When we compare ourselves to Christ we are made to realize that approval only comes by His grace. There is no room for arrogance in the shadow of the holy Christ. When we measure ourselves by Christ there is no allowance for pride. When we measure ourselves by ourselves, there is no approval (v. 18). Rather, there can only be failure and condemnation.

The key to peace in the church and health in relationships, then, is to glory in the Lord: glory in His greatness, His obedience, His faithfulness, and His grace. When I compare my preaching to Christ's, there's not much room left to criticize others. Amen? Amen.

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Remembering A Friend

Dennis Conner

It was ten years ago this month that Howard Winters, editor of Carolina Christian for 17 years, went to be with his Lord. Howard was a devoted husband, loving father, respected preacher, gifted writer, and faithful friend. He was a great encourager of young preachers and in his later years especially knew how to disagree with a brother without being disagreeable. A man of strong convictions, he still knew how to respect those of differing convictions. Howard had his critics, as does any man who dares to venture beyond the status quo and make a difference in the world. Yet, as I came to know him early in my ministry, Howard was his own worst critic.

Howard Winters was not a perfect man, and there are those who would say that they remember a different Howard than I do. However, the vast majority of people who knew him to any degree had only the greatest respect for him. My memories of him are overwhelmingly positive, and even humbling. I would like to share one memory in particular.

Several years ago while we were at Carolina Bible Camp (held in Waynesville, NC that year), Howard left camp in the middle of the first week to go to Greenville, SC, to mail the magazine. He came back the next day very visibly shaken and upset. A few months earlier he had published an article by another brother that proved to be quite controversial. A couple of months later he wrote an extended editorial explaining his own views about the matter and what he understood the brother to be saying. When he picked up the mail in Greenville there was a letter from another preaching brother strongly disagreeing with Howard's editorial.

In the letter the preacher, who had only recently come to the Carolinas, wrote that he and the elders where he preached "are concerned for your soul," and said that the elders had authorized him to offer their church building for a debate (later I was told by those same elders that such was not the case). He further questioned certain facts that Howard had asserted in his editorial. The tone of the letter was wholly confrontational. What disturbed Howard so deeply was not so much that a brother strongly disagreed with him, but that those elders, whom he had known for a long time and who had been among the first to support

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him when he began preaching in the Carolinas, should question his faithfulness to the Lord. Howard was crushed by that thought.

He shared the letter with another close friend and me as we sat in the staff cabin that afternoon.The two of us fussed and fumed and ranted and raved as Howard quietly sat on his bunk. We both launched into a tirade of our own against the brother, outraged at his audacity and shallowness. Howard just sat and listened and did not offer a word until there was a lull in the tirade. Then, sitting on the side of his bunk and looking at us both with the hurt still etched into his face, he said, "Well, I think...he's experienced a lot of problems in the places he's been and has just become defensive. I believe that if we just be patient with this brother and love him, we can help him."

The five seconds of silence that followed seemed like an eternity, and I thought it would be a long time before I would be able to raise my head above my shoe laces. At that moment my friend and I were in the presence of the spirit of Christ.

Well, that memory of Howard is an enduring one and has both rebuked and encouraged me as I have tried to deal with similar situations in my own ministry. There had been times earlier in his ministry when Howard had been critical of others, but life and the Lord had nurtured in him a spirit of mercy and gentleness. I suppose I could focus on and remember Howard's negative qualities (even the best of men have them), but they pale in comparison to that afternoon in the staff cabin at camp.

Oh yes, more than a year later the brother in question apologized for the spirit and tone of his letter. I guess Howard was right.

Brotherhood News

— MARK HUDSON

MORGANTON, NC... The Morganton Church of Christ will be hosting a Ladies Day on May 30, 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The theme is "Bloom Where You Are Planted: Coping in the 21st Century." The speakers will be Mary Scott of Oak Ridge, TN, and Mary Thigpen of Greenville, SC. For more information call the church office at (828) 433-0478.

GREENSBORO, NC... The Friendly Ave. church will be celebrating its 30th anniversary with a Homecoming on July 12. The theme of the celebration will be "Glorify Thy Name."

Mocksville, NC...Staff and campers can now register for Carolina Bible Camp via the internet. The Carolina Bible Camp & Retreat Center homepage can be located at http://users.aol.com/cbible-camp/cbchome/htm. There is also a links page, address book, photo album page, directions to the camp, and weekly registration information.

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(continued on page 8)

Guest Editorial:

The Road to Calvary

MIKIE MOBLEY

Sin represents our greatest tragedy and our deepest failure. Sin wields a vise–like grip on all humanity, ruining lives and corrupting the world. It is the one–person tragedy that has become our own. It is the personal shame—terrible shame—that each of us owns. Our sin, mine and yours, breaks the holy and compassionate heart of God.

> **"OUR SIN, MINE AND YOURS, BREAKS THE HOLY AND COMPASSIONATE HEART OF GOD."**

No one can be saved from this our shame and disgrace until our sin and its tragic consequences break our own hearts; not until we ourselves feel a sense of tragedy, shame and disgrace. And even then, we cannot save ourselves or break free ourselves.

Calvary, the place where Jesus died, is not politically correct and holds no status by worldly standards. The cross was an instrument of shameful and humiliating death, just as my life is filled with shame and humiliation before the holy God. Calvary may not be politically correct, but it is our only hope for redemption from the tragic consequences of our sin. Paul said it well:

"For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God...For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save whose who believe," (1 Corinthians 1:18-21, NASV).

What is the true nature and character of the cross of Jesus? What does it actually mean? What did God do there? Calvary. God loved us there and He judged us there. God's heart was broken there and there He healed it.

The road to Calvary was a journey of sorrow and courage, of service and humility, of meekness and sacrifice, of betrayal and loneliness, and love and self–denial. Calvary was a journey to death, and Jesus knew it. Still, He went there, to Calvary. What amazing love my God demonstrated there on the cross. What God did there in Jesus gives us real life with its joy, peace, hope, truth and love.

That is the cross. It has the power to shape and mold our lives as we believe and live among the saved. The articles in this issue of Carolina Christian are intended to help us appreciate anew the meaning of the cross for God and for us. They are offered in the prayer that they will encourage you in your own cross–walk.

Brotherhood News

(continued from page 7)

gious "Scholarly Achievement Award." Wesley E. McConnell of Little Compton, Rhode Island, was presented with the award during chapel services on April 9, 1998. McConnell ranks among the top students selected each year from colleges and seminaries throughout the United States to receive this honor. He is a student in the Bible program where he is excelling in Greek Studies.

Death and Sin

Peter Rode

Crucifixion was a shameful, degrading, humiliating form of punishment reserved for non–Romans and slaves, and was limited to certain crimes. This was the punishment and death Jesus Christ, the Son of God, endured for mankind's sin. When one realizes the pain, the sheer agony, and the degradation He experienced, one cannot but stand in awe of His love displayed on the cross.

Jesus had already experienced a mockery of a trial, sealing the rejection by His own people. They had spat upon Him, flogged Him, mocked Him, and forced Him to carry His own instrument of torture to the place where He would be hung for all to see. However, Jesus' experience on the cross was not limited to the physical. There on the cross the Sinless One took mankind's sin upon Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21). There He was separated from the Father for the first time (Matthew 27:46) because of man's sin. There God came into direct confrontation with Satan and all his evil power. What is even more flabbergasting, however, is that even before the Lord left heaven, He knew that this was going to happen. Still, He willingly set out on the mission. He loved us so much that He was willing to do whatever was necessary to save us from the consequences of our rebellion against God. We didn't deserve what Jesus did for us, but He did it anyway. That is grace.

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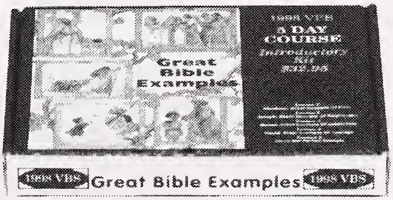

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Jesus, the "second Adam," came to overcome the chaos the first Adam had caused because of sin. Through His death and grace, Christ has been able to destroy the reign of death. As Paul wrote, "For if, by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

Consequently, we for whom Christ died have an obligation to our Savior and Redeemer. In Romans chapter 6, Paul tells us what that obligation is. There has to be a change in our lives—a death and a resurrection—so that we no longer allow sin to reign in our lives, but righteousness instead. From the call of Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) right down to our time, God's expectations have not changed. God has always expected His people to be separate: "Be holy, because I am holy" (Leviticus 11:46). Being one of God's chosen is a great privilege and honor, but along with it comes a tremendous responsibility. The church is now God's chosen instrument to save the lost, and as His people it needs to be distinctively holy. When one identifies with Christ in repentance and baptism, one dies to the old life and is raised to a new life (Romans 6:3-4). The new life must exhibit new tendencies and characteristics because, as Paul says in Romans 6:2, "We who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" One cannot make a separation without undergoing change. In the language of Paul, the Christian has been broken off the wild olive tree and grafted into the holy root (Romans 11). Or as Jesus puts it, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing..." (John 15:5). The fruit we need to bear is the righteousness which comes from communing with Christ and is produced by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:21-22).

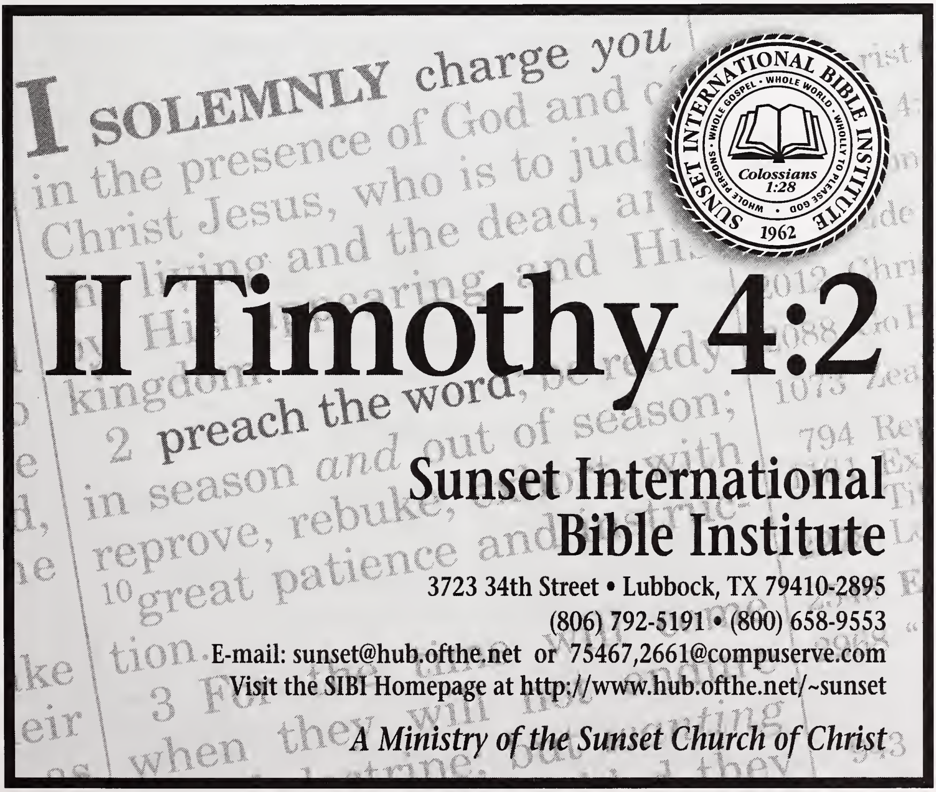
However, we, like the Jews in the time of Jesus, don't quite understand this concept well enough. We have the misconception that our holiness comes from the outside and not the inside! Paul had something to say about that as well, "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God" (Romans 2:28-29).

We are mistaken if we think that we can remain clean and holy by keeping ourselves separate from the "unsavory sinner." The Jews thought, because they were God's people, they were superior to others and were to be separate from the "unclean" pagans. That's why the Pharisees objected to Jesus being in the company of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10-11). They did not realize that uncleanness came not from the outside, but from the inside (Mark 7:1-16; Matthew 23:25-28). One is cleansed by the action of God in one's life, not by what one does or does not do (which is legalism). However, if your heart and attitude are right, then right actions will follow.

The obligation of the Christian, then, is to be cleansed by God and to live a life which reflects God and seeks the salvation of others. We strive to keep ourselves clean as we allow God's Holy Spirit and His word to work in our lives and guide us in our actions. Paul says, "offer yourselves to God…and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness…" (Romans 6:13). We will not allow sin to be our master. Rather, we seek to fill ourselves with God so that we have neither the opportunity nor the inclination to do evil.

As we turn from sin to righteousness, we turn from death to life. We put to death the old man and we put on the new (Colossians 3:5-11). We become transformed in our thinking, and we start testing and approving God's will, "his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). As Christians we have been liberated from the mastery of sin and have been freed to sin no longer. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410. He serves the Friendly Ave. church.



I SOLEMNLY charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:
2 preach the word, be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine
Colossians 1:28
1962

II Timothy 4:2

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God's Breaking Heart
(Luke 19:41-44)

He drew nigh unto the city
And His eyes filled as He wept,
For He knew what would befall it
And His heart within Him leapt;

For He loved them
with a tender love
Far greater than any known,
But nothing could forestall their fate
For they had chosen on their own

To reject Him and despise Him
And seek to take His life,
To stir the multitudes to hate
And fill the streets with strife.

Yet nothing He could say or do
Would change what was to come.
Their hearts were oh so hardened
And their senses fully numb.

His heart was nearly breaking
As He pondered o'er their fate,
For the end was surely coming
And soon it would be too late.

This happened quite some time ago,
About two thousand years,
And yet today that loving man
Still weeps with quiet tears.

For He draws nigh unto our hearts
With the same undying love
And looks upon our very lives
From His home in heaven above.

And He knows what will befall us
If we choose the path they chose;
If we reject and despise Him,
If our hearts to Him we close.

And nothing He can say or do
Can change what is to come
If our hearts are yet so hardened
And our senses fully numb

To the point that we can't fathom
The love that He did show,
When He prayed within the garden
And then freely He did go

To the cruel cross of Calvary,
There to die for you and me
So that from the fate set for us
We could be forever free.

His heart is clearly breaking
As so many scoff and say,
"We have no need of Jesus,
So we'll just be on our way."

We'll lead our lives as we see best,
Never looking 'round the bend
At what will most assuredly be
And eternal, tragic end.

And yet midst all this wrenching pain
He stands with arms flung wide,
Longing for those to come to Him
And in His church abide.

The choice is truly yours and mine.
It's one that we must make.
Do we let His arms enfold us,
Or again see His heart break?

— Joyce Smith

Joyce Smith worships with the Kannapolis church and can be contacted at 3958 Longwood Dr., Concord, NC 28027.

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The Lonely Tragedy of Sin
(Matthew 27: 45-56)

PAUL JARRETT

It is not uncommon to hear those presiding at the Lord's Table speak of the agony of the cross. In doing so they will talk about Christ's bleeding back, the crown of thorns, the nails in His hands and feet, and the agonizing death by suffocation inflicted by the cross. Certainly we cannot say enough about the physical pain Jesus endured on the cross.

However, the agony of the cross was more than just physical. The agony Jesus endured included betrayal, denial, and desertion by His friends. It included false accusations and cruel mocking from His enemies. It climaxed with a sense of abandonment by God. All together, these added up to the lonely tragedy of sin.

The loneliness Jesus experienced was inflicted on Him by others. His decision to do the right thing, the courageous thing, led to His being abandoned by those friends who lacked the strength to do the same. His commitment to doing God's will angered His enemies and led them to try and disparage Him with false accusations, and bring Him down to their level by calling on Him to put His own interests ahead of those for whom He was dying.

The loneliness Jesus experienced was also self–inflicted as a result of His own choice to take upon Himself the sins of all mankind. In doing so Jesus exposed Himself to the ultimate loneliness that occurred when sin separated Him from God. The sky turned dark as God turned away from His Son, who at that moment was bearing in His flesh the sins of the world. If hell is that place where God is not, then it was the agony of hell which caused Jesus to cry out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus taught that as His disciples we must be willing to take up our cross daily and follow Him. While we may never be called on to suffer the kind of physical pain Jesus endured on the cross, we will all have occasion to suffer the lonely tragedy of sin. That this can, and does, occur is made evident when we consider the origin of Jesus' plaintive cry of abandonment.

The words Jesus used are from Psalm 22:1. While they take on prophetic significance because of Christ's use of them on the cross, like all of the psalms these words are first of all expressive of the kind of human emotion we all feel on occasion. In using these words, Jesus exhibits His identification with David and every person who has ever cried out in despair, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?".

There are going to be occasions in your life when you are going to feel like you are standing alone in your commitment to doing the right thing. You may feel betrayed and abandoned by your friends. There will be times when you must endure the false accusations of enemies. You may be mocked by those who are offended and made to feel guilty by your commitment to doing the right thing. They may call on you to abandon your principles and join them in the pursuit of self–interest. Should you find yourself faced with such situations, remember these words from I Peter 2:20-23, "But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God…For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; and while being

(continued on page 17)

The Greatest Love
Another Look at WWJD

Sharon Albright

WWJD has become quite a popular slogan these days. You can find it everywhere: on bracelets, T–shirts, hats, necklaces, even notebooks. The letters stand for "What would Jesus Do?" The concept is an excellent one, encouraging and challenging Christians to let Jesus be the decision maker in their lives. In large or small decisions, major or minor problem areas in our lives, Jesus' code of ethics must be or standard. I would like to suggest an additional perspective of WWJD: "Why Would Jesus Die?"

> "I would like to suggest an additional perspective of WWJD: 'Why Would Jesus Die?'

The popular WWJD has to do with actions. The WWJD that I have suggested has to do with the motivating factors behind the actions. This was the heart condition Jesus yearned for His own disciples to grasp. In Mark 12:28-31 Jesus answered a question about motivation and action: "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' " The greatest command wasn't action, as such, but a motivation. All actions toward God and man grow out of the motivation of love.

As we look into the heart of the Master and ask, "Why would Jesus die?" we see submission, commitment, and selfless love. We can contrast His motivations with the motivations of those around Him. In Mark 14 and 15 we find a series of events that highlight that very contrast.

The first event involved a woman who poured expensive perfume on Jesus' head. He looked beyond the action and saw her motivation—love for Him and a desire to express that love. Christ's response was also one of love, thankfulness and understanding. But look at the others in this brief encounter. In verse 4 some of those present raised the criticism, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." Theirs was not a genuine concern for the poor. Rather, there seems to be a bit of greed creeping in around the edges of their criticism. Soon afterward Judas approached the chief priests with an offer they couldn't refuse. What was his motivation? Greed? Jealousy? Anger? Probably a combination of all three. And what about the motivation of the chief priests? Envy? Definitely. Fear of losing their status and power? Certainly. Anger at His ability to see them as they really were? Yes.

The time for Passover was near. Some disciples were sent to prepare the feast. Jesus was involved in some preparations of His own. We are not specifically told their motivations as the disciples readied the room and the food. They had been taught that the law was to be followed to the letter, so they were moved to act exactly as the law directed. They also had a desire to be with Jesus. His teaching, especially recently, had been disturbing and unsettling. They wanted reassurance from their friend. Jesus, on the other hand, had a last opportunity to try to convey an understanding of the events that were about to take place. He was motivated by a strong love for these men and a commitment to the purpose He came to earth to fulfill. these motivations caused Him to teach the most beautiful lesson in servanthood by washing their feet. His selfless love becomes even more powerful and beautiful in that He was keenly aware that one would betray Him and all the others would desert Him; but still he washed their feet. As Jesus broke bread and passed the wine, He yearned for them to understand God's plan.

As they left the room and headed toward Gethsemane, He alone knew what He faced. His friends had not understood and had even argued with His declarations of how they each would react. He was alone with His terror. There can be no trivialization of the struggle in Gethsemane. Jesus was human, as well as divine. If something is difficult for us as humans, it was even harder to Him. Jesus knew exactly what was to happen and as a human struggled with those things. The Lord's struggle is clear as we hear Him groan, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," and plead, "Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me." Human emotions and dread of the awful burden He would bear fought to take control. His struggle continued as He prayed, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." Submission won.

Judas' betrayal did indeed become reality. And another follower struck out with the sword. Why? Fear? Loyalty? Self–preservation? Jesus calmly healed His enemy with selfless love. Still, fear and panic reigned and the King was deserted.

Jesus was then taken to the religious leaders. Throughout His ministry they had tried to discredit Him by quoting Scriptures about required actions. Their desperate efforts continued out of vengeful, envious hearts. But "Jesus remained silent and gave no answer" out of a sorrowful, submissive heart. So they condemned Him and their anger took complete control as they spit, struck and belittled Him. Their blows, however, were met by love, submission and forgiveness.

Peter had fled in fear. Perhaps he returned to the court outside the place where Jesus was being tried because of guilt, renewed loyalty, or curiosity. But soon the motives of self–preservation and fear again controlled his actions. Jesus was denied. Then remorse gave way to weeping.

Pilate entered the drama. His interest was aroused by the ruckus this man had been causing among the Jews. The leaders certainly were riled. It seems he just wanted a quick confession or denial of guilt from Jesus. Then he could make an easy decision and get on with the day. However, he found, as many others find, that an encounter with Jesus is never quick and easy. He knew there was something unusual about the man and the mob. He recognized the envy of the crowd and the selflessness of the accused. His wife's message added fear to his reasons for seeking Jesus' release, but again humanness won out. Pilate's decisive action was based on his own selfish desire for power and personal security.

The King was scourged, mocked, and insulted by hearts filled with pride. He was led away and crucified. Why? Not because of human strength. He was not subject to human power, but to His own. His power had created the universe, yet He allowed it to be restrained by ropes and nails. Why? He was the living water, yet He died thirsty. Why? He was the light of the world but died in darkness. Why? God Himself was torn apart as the perfectly pure Father God turned away from the sin carrying Son God. WWJD? Why would Jesus die? Simply because of the purest motivation of all: totally submissive, selfless love.

Sharon Albright is a public school teacher. Her husband, Rob, preaches for the Thomasville church of Christ. She can be contacted at 612 Lakeview Dr., Thomasville, NC 27360.

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(continued from page 14)

reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

While the sin which separated Jesus form God as he hung on the cross was not His own, there will be times when we feel distant from God as a result of our own sin. When this occurs, and we feel the loneliness such separation causes, we may take comfort in these words from Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

Whether our experience with the lonely tragedy of sin is self–inflicted, or visited on us by others, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus knows what we are going through. We may rejoice in the fact that He made the choice described in the chorus of this familiar hymn:

"He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set Him free.

He could have called ten thousand angels, but He died alone for you and me."

Paul Jarrett can be reached at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102

The Road of Courage

PAUL MOBLEY

There was a man who would stop and help anyone who was in distress of any kind, never asking for pay nor fearing any repercussions. Many times he wouldn't give his name, for he was not looking for personal reward. He would stop and talk to anyone, often being the one to initiate the conversation. Obviously he was a good–hearted man, yet some would demean him by calling him an over zealous do–gooder. Wherever he went, people were affected.

According to a reliable source, there was a man who lived near Florence, Italy, and walked to work each day. He always wore a happy smile when he encountered people; not a mere grin, but a smile that exuded happiness. He would speak to everyone he met along the way and would gladly stop and talk to anyone who had a moment for him. He was a Christian, and he was credited with bringing 26 people to Christ. What is unusual is that this man could not read orwrite. He had no bad days. He was so happy to be a Christian that he could not help showing his happiness, nor could he refrain from telling everyone he encountered about his happiness.

Was this man courageous? I think so. He understood that he had received a great prize from Christ that brought a joy so compelling that he had to tell anyone and everyone about it. And people listened.

There was another man two thousand years ago who could be described in these same ways. He went about the roads and streets ready to talk with and help anyone. Indeed, he often initiated such encounters. He had no prejudices that sorted people by race, nationality, age, material wealth, power, or gender. He refused to be limited by the usual barriers and constraints of society. He was a free man, engaging in what he believed and desired to do. He went about doing much good through teaching and helping those in need. He acted at every opportunity to do good as he went through his life.

His name was Jesus.

Jesus was focused on God and His Word. All that mattered was to do the will of the Father ("...I do not seek my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me," John 5:30). He sought to relate God's Word to anyone who would listen. He taught and lived the will and Word of God without fear, refusing to allow anyone lesser than God to guide Him, rule Him, or prevent Him from doing that which God desired of Him. His priorities were clear in His own mind, disallowing defeat because of what any man might think of Him, or do to Him. The many insults, confrontations, attempts to trick Him and to capture Him never diverted Jesus from His mission.

Here, then, is Jesus, with beliefs and courage strong enough to carry Him through all the difficult experiences of His life. The courage of His convictions and faithful reliance upon God were traits that combined for history–changing spiritual success. Jesus knew that eventually He would die a terrible death at the hands of His enemies, yet, He said that He would do it willingly (John 10:17-18). That is courage.

Through it all Jesus never forgot God, nor did He forget to trust in Him. In courageous love, Jesus' eye, mind, and soul were set on the Father above and mankind below. None of the intimidation of the Jews, the soldiers, Pilate, nor the desertion of His friends caused Jesus to forget God. He knew that the Father was trustworthy and dependable. Knowing this, Jesus never paused to tremble, never withdrew in fear, never yielded to His own desires. To the very end He faithfully served the God who loved Him, and who He loved more than all others. With courage He fulfilled the will of His Father.

Jesus is the perfect example of undaunted, matchless courage. He is the example of what hope and love mean for all who will follow after Him with a like love and trust. With God all things are possible. With God we can find the courage to do the right thing and to face all situations without flinching. The reward for such courage exceeds all others. As a consequence of His courage Jesus attained that most precious of prizes—heaven and all its glories. The Christian today has that same reward awaiting him or her. Have courage.

Paul Mobley can be contacted at Rt. 3 Box 410, Cynthiana, KY 41031.

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CAROLINA christian

"The LORD is gracious and merciful;
Slow to anger and great in
lovingkindness.
The LORD is good to all,
And His mercies are over
all His works.
All Thy works shall give thanks to
Thee, O LORD,
And Thy godly ones shall
bless Thee."
(Psalm 145:8-10, NASV)

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Editorial:

Hope's Touch

DENNIS CONNER

"And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him, and touched the fringe of His cloak; and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. And Jesus said, 'Who is the one who touched me?' And while they were all denying it, Peter said, 'Master, the multitudes are crowding and pressing upon You.' But Jesus said, 'Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me.' And when the woman saw that she had not escaped notice, she came trembling and fell down before Him, and declared in the presence of all the people the reason why she had touched Him, and how she had been immediately healed. And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace' " (Luke 8:43-48).

The inclusion of this story by Luke, the physician turned historian, in his narrative of the life of Jesus is most interesting. It is interesting, for one reason, in that Luke was himself a physician by profession. With this story he seems to be acknowledging that doctors are limited and that they cannot always deliver on the hope they promise. In a sense, doctors are brokers of hope; theirs is to be a ministry of hope for wholeness. However, as Luke realized, the doctors of his day could promise much but guarantee little. With this story he points his reader, Theophilus, to the One who not only promised, but delivered. He is telling his friend, perhaps, that hope and wholeness are the hallmarks of Jesus' ministry.

Hope is the centerpiece of this story. As we read it today, the story not only points the seeker to the One who is hope, but also informs the modern church of the kind of ministry it is to be engaged in. Ours is to be a ministry of hope.

For twelve years the woman had been suffering from recurring hemorrhages. One visit after another had been made to the physicians of her day, but with no success. Each visit to a new doctor saw the rekindling of her dwindling hope, and each time the hope was quenched.

Because of her condition, the woman was considered by the Law to be unclean (Leviticus 15:22ff), and anything she touched would also be considered unclean. Most of the people of her time would have viewed her condition as a judgment from God for some sin. All these facts taken together paint a picture of a woman whose suffering was more than physical; it was psychological, spiritual and social as well. It is a picture of hopelessness and despair. Then came Jesus.

We are not told anything about the circumstances that led the woman to number herself with the multitude that day, but we can easily imagine that she must have

Editorial continued:

heard about Jesus' reputation and was gathered with the others who were awaiting His return from the region of the Gergesenes (v. 40). Had word of the curing of the Gergesene demoniac already reached the ears of the people prior to Jesus' return? Perhaps. Different motives likely brought them all together: some expecting to see a show, curiosity, belief, and in the case of the woman, hope. No sooner had He set foot on the shore than a synagogue official named Jairus approached the Lord in his own desperate hope that Jesus could heal his gravely ill daughter. Without hesitation Jesus set out for the home of Jairus with the multitude crowding and pressing every step of the way.

Perhaps the woman thought the crowd might offer a protective covering of anonymity, hiding her disappointment and humiliation if Jesus, too, should be unable to help. Somehow she apparently found a small opening between the bodies and strained forward, perhaps timidly, to touch Jesus. That touch has much to tell us. That touch was but the body language of hope. Time and time again her hopes had been raised, only to be dashed upon the jagged rocks of disappointment. One more time she dares to hope (dear, brave woman) and this time, her hope settled in the right One, her desperate dream was realized. She was healed, and with the healing made whole.

Jesus immediately recognized that something significant had just happened. With all the hands reaching out to touch Him and all the bodies pressing against Him, He was able to discern that one touch out of all the others was different. "Who touched me?" Trembling (from fear? joy? wonder? all of these?) she came forward and told her story to the Lord in the presence of the multitude. Hearing her, Jesus then confirmed her healing and blessed her faith.

It's a very moving story, but what does it have to do with the church today? How does it instruct our present-day mission and ministry? Very simply, it tells us about the things that matter most in peoples' lives. What mattered to this woman is what matters to most people. What she sought is what most people today are seeking—wholeness. Her life was broken and empty. Her suffering was intensely personal. Every avenue of seeming hope and wholeness had proved to be a dead end street, until she came to Jesus.

People today differ very little from that woman. Their pain might be that of a betrayed trust and a broken marriage. Their humiliation

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might be that of some addictive behavior. They may be suffering at the hands of a rebellious child or a depression they don't understand. Victimization at the hands of corporate downsizing and the bottom line may have left a once secure livelihood tenuous at best and devastated at worst. Others make their way down every dark, dirty alley in life trying to find even a fleeting moment of happiness, only to run headlong into a brick wall at the end. All around us we see the litter of broken lives. We are surrounded by people who, like the woman in the story, are desperately hoping and searching for wholeness. And that's where the church comes in.

It is our task to point these people to the only One in whom there is everlasting hope. Our mission is to bring them to Jesus. Our ministry is to recognize their hopelessness and brokenness and encourage them to reach out and touch Christ the Healer.

What saddens me, however, is that many of us are out of touch with what is going on in the lives of people in our society. We are too busy isolating ourselves from the unpleasantness of the world. Or so preoccupied with the business of drawing lines where God has not drawn them and binding judgments that God has not bound that what matters to us is not what matters to those who are perishing without hope. Our ears are so filled with the loudness of our own arguing with one another that we cannot hear the desperate pleas of those all around us crying out for help. Or worse, we are just simply insensitive to the suffering of those around us.

> "That touch was but the body language of hope."

May God help us to be about the business of pointing people to the One who alone can make them whole.

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Hudson Named Brotherhood News Editor

Mark Hudson, who preaches for the Whiskey Rd. church of Christ in Aiken, SC, has been named the new Brotherhood News Editor for *Carolina Christian*. He succeeds Mike Mobley, the previous department editor, who asked to be relieved of the position due to the time constraints of his job as a teacher. Brother Mobley will continue to contribute articles to *Carolina Christian* as time permits and will on occasion serve as an editor of special theme issues. The Board of Directors expresses its heartfelt gratitude to brother Mobley for his service as Brotherhood News Editor over the past two and a half years.

Brother Hudson's duties begin with the current issue. He asks that all churches in our readership be sure to put him on their bulletin mailing list and that all relevant news items be sent directly to him at 2006 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803.

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Encouragement to Mothers

JIM MULLICAN

Editor's Note: We had intended to include this article by brother Mullican in last month's issue in recognition of Mother's Day. Unfortunately, due to the space required for last month's theme articles, we were not able to. Though a bit late, we feel that the article still needs to be shared with all our readers as we seek to give due honor to those diligent faith shapers called Mother.

In Paul's last letter, Second Timothy, the aged apostle writes to his friend Timothy, who was perhaps 35-40 years old at the time. Paul said, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (2 Timothy 1:5). A little farther on he wrote, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Timothy's preparation for service in the kingdom of God had begun long before he knew Paul or heard him preach the gospel at Lystra. He had learned faith in God on the knees of his mother and grandmother, and had known the scriptures since childhood.

Many of us would also have to admit that our mothers are primarily responsible for our being Christians today. That early training is difficult to forget. I can still remember sitting in Bible class as a preschooler the first time we attended the church of Christ when I was about four years old, and the Christian Church before that. It was always my mother who took us.

Each young mother knows the discouragement that can overwhelm her. Sometimes she feels like a pack horse, loaded down with diaper bag, blankets, extra clothes and a baby. Sometimes she feels like a wrestler, struggling to maintain control. She is often self-conscious, feeling she is wasting her time and that of others.

"But do not be discouraged. The child who cries today will soon be singing hymns."

But do not be discouraged. The

child who cries today will soon be singing hymns. What if Timothy's mother had given up and kept him home until he was "old enough to behave?" There will indeed be difficult times, but remember that you are bringing up that child in the way he should go (Proverbs 22:6).

Those of us who have already completed these difficult times should be especially sympathetic and supportive of young mothers. Our future elders, preachers, and Bible class teachers are being taught faith in God. Let's all rejoice at the number of children we have in our midst. Children are one of the signs of a living and growing church. Quiet and order are nice, but tombs and dead churches are also quiet. Thank God for the children and encourage the mothers who shape their faith.

Brotherhood News

— MARK HUDSON

PARKERSBURG, WV... **Robert W. Stephens, Jr.** has been named the sixth president of Ohio Valley College. Outgoing president Keith Stotts has become the school's first chancellor and will focus his efforts on fund raising. RALEIGH, NC... **Donnie Williams** has joined the staff of the Brooks Avenue church of Christ as Campus Evangelist. Donnie's wife is named Cinda, and their daughters are Molly and Abigail. The Williams have moved to Raleigh from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. AIKEN, SC...The Aiken church of Christ on Whiskey Road appointed two more as elders on May 10. Elders **Norm Bryan** and **Ben LaMunyon** are joined by **Art Greer** and **Sam Soper**. YADKINVILLE, NC... Participants from five states attended the 12th annual Small Church Workshop May 14-15. The workshop was sponsored by the Yadkinville church of Christ. This year's theme was "Prescriptions for Church Health: Healthy Churches Are Growing Churches." SPRING LAKE, NC...Having been blessed with steady growth, the Spring Lake church of Christ is in the process of constructing a new facility on the main thorough- fare in Fayetteville. The new building will accommodate 480 people and will have ten class rooms. The church has been able to raise most of the needed funds, which exceeds $830,000. However, due to unforeseen expenses they are still $80,000 short of their goal and are seeking one-time donations from congregations and individuals interested in participating in this vital ministry. For more information call the church office at (919) 497-1628, or write to the Spring Lake Church of Christ, 431 Chapel Hill Rd., Spring Lake, NC 28390.

Please send bulletins, announcements of special events, personnel changes and any other pertinent news items to Mark Hudson, c/o Aiken Church of Christ, 2006 Whiskey Road, Aiken SC 29803. (803) 649-2700. Email: mrhudfam@aol.com.

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Truth in Labeling

PAUL JARRETT

The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) requires "truth in labeling". It would be beneficial if the church would do the same, particularly as it comes to the terms "legalist" and "liberal" that are so freely affixed to various brethren these days.

I recognize that word definitions may vary and are subject to individual interpretation. Further, neither of the words "legalist" or "liberal" appear in the Bible, but are humanly conceived words to describe concepts that do appear in the Bible. However, if we insist on using them it seems we ought to be able to come up with a definition of these terms that is both grammatically and biblically correct.

The meaning of both legalist and liberal centers around an approach to law. From a grammatical standpoint a legalist advocates a strict adherence to law, while a liberal is more inclined to focus on the freedom of individuals to act as they choose.

From a biblical perspective a legalist would be one who places his confidence regarding salvation in his own adherence to law. The liberal on the other hand would be described as antinomian (i.e. against law), at least as far as it has anything to do with one's salvation, which they believe is exclusively a matter of "grace through faith".

It is my experience that those who have been labeled "legalists" and those who have been labeled "liberal" in our brotherhood would both at least claim to concur with Paul's condemnation of both extremes in Galatians 5. However, both sides continue to label those on the other side. We seem to be unable (I pray it is not that we are unwilling) to make distinction between legalism, liberalism, and the Spirit-directed life commended by Paul.

Perhaps, we can be helped to make this distinction by examining three familiar incidents from the Old Testament. These three are the stories of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10); Moses and the rock (Numbers 20); and Uzzah and the ark (2 Samuel 6). You might want to read these stories again before answering the following three questions:

1. Why did God burn Nadab and Abihu with fire from heaven?
2. Why did God forbid Moses to enter the Promise Land?
3. Why was Uzzah struck dead?

If you answered by saying, because they offered strange fire; because he struck the rock; and because he touched the ark, you may be a legalist. If you answered all three questions by saying that it was because they were under a legal code and that today God would not have acted as He did then, you may be a liberal.

By definition a legalist is someone who measures his confidence in God's acceptance by what he does and does not do. He believes that right and wrong practices are the ultimate determination of a person's eternal destiny. His interpretation of these three stories tends to confirm his viewpoint.

By definition a liberal rejects adherence to law as playing a part in man's salvation. Hence, he tends to see these stories as illustrative of the harshness of a legal system, but having no application to our salvation except as a means of contrasting the law and his own "warm and fuzzy" view of grace.

The middle ground of the Spirit-led life which Paul advocated in Galatians 5 is illustrated in these three stories when they are carefully read. Read each story, paying close attention to verse 3 in Leviticus 10; verse 12 in Numbers 20; and verse 7 in 2 Samuel 6 (NASB). After reading these verses, what is your answer to the three questions posed earlier?

If you read these texts carefully, you should have seen that in each instance the punishment was meted out for ***Irreverence***. The actions of those who were punished were significant only because they exhibited their failure to sanctify God in their hearts.

The legalist needs to learn from these three stories that not every case of wrongdoing is to be judged the same since not every case of wrongdoing is a result of irreverence. For an even better appreciation of this read the story recorded in 2 Chronicles 30:13-21.

The liberal needs to learn from these stories that God remains concerned about our actions to whatever degree those actions reflect our attitude towards Him. To appreciate this one need only read James 2:14-24.

Liberals err when they assume it makes *no difference* what you believe and practice. Legalists err when they assume that what you believe and practice makes *all the difference*. The Spirit–led Christian will seek to be right in all his beliefs and practices, while knowing full–well that all of us fall short of perfection in both knowledge and practice. With that in mind, I would like to conclude with these words from the pen of the apostle Paul:

"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God" (1 Corinthians 4:1-5).

Paul Jarrett can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102.

A Column for Youth

An Enemy and a Loser

DANNY BOGGS

Singer Sarah McLachlan said in the January, 1998 issue of *Details*, "I think the devil has gotten a bad rap. The devil is the fallen angel, the one who was willing to embrace his dark side, whereas all the other angels were in total denial." Is there something wrong with this picture of Satan? Yes. Everything!

First, *the devil got* ***himself*** *a bad rap*. It seems all of heaven could not contain his ego. The apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:16, "He earned the title 'the devil' by his own actions. The word 'devil' literally means 'accuser' or 'slanderer.' He is a diabolical schemer who cares for no one but himself. He will use and abuse anyone to get what he wants. The devil is a fiend and a friend to no one!

Second, *the devil is only one of* ***numerous*** *fallen angels*. He is a leader, but he is not alone. Several angels fell from heaven with him. As Peter said, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment" (2 Timothy 2:4). In Jude 6 we read, "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day."

Third, *the devil was wrong to embrace "the dark side."* "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Satan turned from God for the same reason people still do today, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). God created angels and us to be light and to love light. To embrace darkness is to ignore the very purpose for which God created us. Paul warned, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."

Fourth, *the devil and the angels that followed him are the ones in "total denial."* He is the father of lies, and lying is his language (John 8:44). Did he really think he could defeat Jesus? He wants you to think so! Satan was a spiritual being who enjoyed all the blessings of God's presence. He chose to ignore the truth and for that choice he will suffer forever (Revelation 20:10).

Make no mistake about it; the devil is our enemy. That is what the name "Satan" means. Sometimes he comes at us like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). At other times he looks like an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Don't let him fool you the way he has fooled Sarah McLachlan.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10). Satan's power is death, but Jesus has already beaten him in his own arena! The devil is our enemy and an eternal loser!

Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791. If you would like to submit an article for this column, please send it to Danny at this address.

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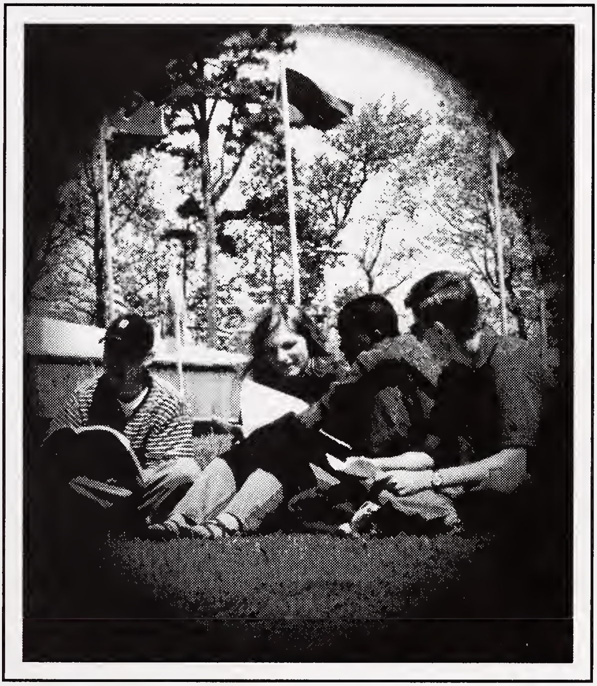

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A Love Letter to Jesus

NATASHA KUDRYA

Dear Jesus,

You may wonder why I write this letter to You, since You know everything about me better than I do myself. You know how I feel, what I want and when I hurt. But You told me that You want me to let my requests be known to You, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, and You will provide Your peace for my soul, the peace which surpasses all understanding, the peace which guards my heart and my mind, so much troubled by sin. I simply want You to know who You are for me and what You mean in my life.

Your love is the only reason for my existence and my living today. You fill up my every morning and night with Your meaning, care and joy. You healed me from the ugly and devastating leprosy of sin, which was devouring my soul, making me unclean forever. I was hopeless and helpless, but did not know it. You came into my life and cleansed me by Your tender and holy hand, washed me by Your powerful blood. Your love was not afraid to come down to the spiritual Skid Row where I was, to claim my soul and bear the burden of my transgressions for me. Your love did not despise me in my shame, weakness and filth. Taking away my leprosy, You covered me with pure white wedding garments and called me Your bride; me, the former prisoner and victim of sin. You entrusted me with Your precious life-giving Spirit, reviving me every day. You gave me the privilege of starting and finishing every day with You. You know I need air to breathe every moment, and You became that for me. You have become my everything and my all.

You are my encouragement when I'm about to give up—on life and on myself; You are the Captain of my life, my stability and the anchor amidst all of the waves and turmoil piling over me. You are the blooming orchard filled with the sweet aroma of spring and the hope of new beginning when it seems that winter will last forever. You are the glorious sunrise of my life and the brightest rainbow shining across the ocean through the tears of rain. You are the most valuable pearl and priceless diamond of my soul; You are the best jewelry I'd ever want to wear. You are the night's rest so much needed for the weary soul and body. You are the soul-warming fire flames in a cozy fireplace on a dark, cold, desperate February night. You are the symphony of my life, performed by tender violins of love, powerful cellos of faith and inspiring flutes of hope. You are the healing cool hand touching my feverish soul, sick with sin.

You are the Christmas tree from my childhood, glittering and sparkling with unexpected blessings and long-awaited-for gifts; You are the fulfillment of every desire and dream which is hidden in the deep mazes of my heart. You are the happy smile on the lips of my soul and a tender, sunny stroke on my heart's face; You are the refreshing gulp of fresh water in a dry desert of life.

Jesus, You are the paradox of my existence: having tasted from Your sweetness I will never hunger or thirst again, but at the same time I will hunger and thirst for You always, for You are my fulfilling abundance and my constant need. The cup of Your happiness never runs empty, and yet there's never enough of You. You are the Lord and the King, whom I worship and serve, and yet You are also my lover who loves me the deepest, satisfying every need of mine and sacrificing Yourself for me. You are my brightest feast in my most mundane day; You are the loudest cry of ecstasy and the lowest whisper of comfort. You know me best, but yet You love me when at my worst.

You are the Love of my life, my Best Friend and my Strong Brother, my Faithful Commitment and Committed Faithfulness. My life is empty, nothing without You.

Now it's hard for me to imagine how I could live without You, but I did! There was another in my life, handsome and attractive, looking the part, promising so much and appealing greatly to me. His name was the World. I thought he was the one for me; I believed we would be together for the rest of my life. Then I mistook his lusts for Your Love, his empty promises and lies for Your fulfilling faith and hope, his loud "admiration" for Your quiet forgiveness.

At that time I did not have enough faith—I was confused and scared—but I had had enough of myself, and inwardly, instinctively I felt this eternal urge to be closer to the One who is everlastingly loving, forgiving and merciful. I closed my eyes, stepped down to the grave of baptism, and...I was almost blinded by the shine of Your glory, feeling so happy and new inside.

Complete surrender, together forever, "for better or for worse" (mine is worse, and Yours is better).

"You have become me everything and my all."

The more I am with You, the more I grow to love You; or rather, the more You make me love You, first loving me Yourself.

How do You love me? Let me count:

By every drop of Your innocent blood which was shed for my impurities;

By every nail going into Your flesh, bringing You pain and despair meant for me;

By the cross, a scary and shameful tool of punishment in the eyes of the world, but the source of salvation, forgiveness and hope for those who would have never been pardoned otherwise;

By every tear of concern and heartache when I turn my back to You and love myself and the world more than You;

By every beam of sunshine and every color of rainbow after a heavy storm in my life, giving me hope of Your comfort and comfort of Your hope;

By every star in the night sky, sending me Your light and scattering the darkness of my soul;

By being there for me when I need it the most, but think of You the least.

My Dear Lord, I'm eternally thankful to You for Your exclusive and ultimate love for me, for Your faithfulness, in which You keep all of Your words and promises. Please, grant me a tender heart that longs to be with You and walk Your ways. May I never want to come back to the world and its sinful ways, but instead dream only of being pleasing to You and keeping Your ordinances. May I follow You and walk any road You want me to walk, at any cost. I know that Your blessings and reward would be great, and not only in heaven, but already here! Please, help me to become sacrificial for You and strengthen my faith in those sacrifices. May there never be anything or anybody standing between You and me—only Your grace and my obedience. Be blessed, praised and glorified for ever and ever! In my risen Savior's name, who is coming back to take me home, Amen.

All Your Love in Me and All
My Love in You,
Natasha

Natasha Kudrya lives in Donetsk, Ukraine. She is an interpreter and has been a Christian for five years.

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The King's Message

Peter Rode

Jesus proclaimed in Luke 19:10 that He had come to seek and save what was lost. He died and rose again and built His church so that people might be saved from sin to live abundantly and eternally. This is good news, the gospel of Jesus! However, without hearing the good news so that they can respond to it, people are lost and dying and Jesus' sacrifice will have been in vain in such cases. Paul wrote, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?...Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:13-17).

Jesus' last words to His disciples were, "Go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19-20). They were to do this by teaching and preaching the good news about what Jesus had done for mankind. This "great commission" is imperative to the church's continued existence. If the first disciples had not complied with Jesus' command, the church would never have grown. In fact, without the gospel message being handed down from one generation to the next, the church would have died long ago in the dim shadows of history.

It is absolutely essential that we continue to take the message to others so that the story might continue. The need is to cultivate the same sort of attitude towards the importance of our King's message that Harold Vidian had for the message of the king of England on January 21, 1930, when Harold became a hero. Donald McCullough tells the story in his book, *The Trivialization of God.* King George V was scheduled to deliver the opening address at the London Arms Conference and his message was to be broadcast around the world. Shortly before the king was to speak, a member of the CBS radio staff tripped over an electrical wire and broke it, cutting off the whole American audience. Without hesitation, Vidian, the chief controller, restored the current by joining both ends of the broken wire together in his hands. Electricity surged through his body, but, ignoring the pain, Vidian held on until the king had finished his address.

Vidian's action is a challenge for all Christians. The attitude that he demonstrated that day was "the message of the king must go out." How much more important is the message of the King of kings and the Lord of lords? Only as we allow the power of God to pass through us can the Savior's gospel of salvation be transmitted to all the world.

I challenge you to rise and accept the commission. This week, tell someone about Jesus.

Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

When the Truth Is Out of Season . . . .

DANNY BOGGS

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

When we realize that an evangelist is someone who brings good news, we know that it is important not just for "professional" preachers, but for everyone who is a Christian to listen to this charge. That the truth is indeed out of season in America is illustrated by the general reaction to the scandal currently surrounding the White House. As Joel Belz suggests in *World* magazine, the alleged behavior of the President is not the main problem, but "the American public is—the American people numbly going on about their normal business on any given morning and seemingly unable to get upset any- more about anything" ("We Are What We Think," February 14, 1998, p. 5).

Belz goes on to point out that as a people we live with a different perspective on life than was once the case. "The essence of that world view is that no values are supernaturally stated or imposed; they're made up as you go along. Such is now the way of doing politics, governing the world's strongest nation, doing business, marrying, starting then maintaining a family, divorcing, entertaining, creating art and music, playing sports, worshiping, and everything else we do in life."

What should we do when the truth is out of season? First, *we must preach the Word*. King Jesus is coming and He will judge the living and the dead. We have to get people ready for His return. We must use God's Word to correct, rebuke and encourage, and we must do so patiently and carefully. However, we shouldn't define patience as mere tolerance so that we neglect correction, rebuke and encouragement.

Second, *we must keep our heads in all situations*. In verse 4 Paul equated the Word we preach with the truth, and he said that people who have itching ears will turn away from that truth. Jesus also equated God's Word with the truth in John 17:17 as He prayed that the Father would sanctify us, or set us apart from sin and the world by the truth. The prevailing attitude in our society says that if I'm happy with my life, what is true really doesn't matter. If we are not careful, our own ears will easily be infected with that call of our culture.

The call is clear. Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season!

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CAROLINA christian

"I will dwell in them, and walk among them.
I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
(2 Corinthians 6:16)

CAROLINA christian

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Editorial:

A Call to Holiness

Dennis Conner

On an episode of *Home Improvement* some years ago the oldest son in the Taylor family, Brad, learned a valuable lesson. He had just become a teenager and had begun to feel that with his new status he deserved greater privilege; in this case, his own room. He finally got his way, forcing his younger brother to move into a room with their baby brother. However, by the end of the episode Brad finds himself in his younger brother's room, confessing that having his own room was not quite what he thought it would be. Translation: he was having to keep his room clean all by himself! Then he said, "Mom says that greater privilege means greater responsibility." There it is, a spiritual lesson that we are often slow to recognize and internalize: greater privilege (status) means greater responsibility (holiness).

> *"The people of God are called to no less than the full dedication of themselves to a life of purity and service to God."*

In the letter we know as Second Corinthians Paul notes that in Christ we are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17). In 2 Corinthians 6:18 he observes that we have a new status as the people of God, "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty." That's the privilege. Then, the responsibility: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (7:1). With these words Paul issues a clear and decisive call to believers to live in a way that powerfully reflects who we are as the people of God.

The Appeal: For Purification, "Let us cleanse ourselves..."

But isn't God the only one who can cleanse from sin? In terms of the actual removal of the stain and penalty of sin, yes. We dare not think that we can accomplish this ourselves. However, in this context Paul uses "cleanse" to refer to the responsibility of the believer to guard his own heart and life against sin, and to do what is necessary, by the power of God and His Spirit, to break free of the sinful practices that have taken root in our lives.

This cleansing is to affect the entire being of the believer, "from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit..." Whatever defiles us both outwardly and inwardly must be dealt with in the pursuit of holiness. We cannot rationalize, tolerate or compromise that which we know is defiling our lives spiritually. Anything that stands in the way of becoming like God must be removed. The people of God are called to no less than the full dedication of themselves to a life of purity and service to God.

The Basis: "Having these promises..."

The promises that Paul speaks of here are the divine assurances of a new status are the divine assurances of a new status as children of God and His presence in their midst as His people (6:18). The logical consequence of possessing such promises is that the people of God should make a complete break with every defiling practice and every unhealthy compromise. *With greater privilege comes greater responsibility.* The responsibility, very simply, is that in view of who we are as the people of God, we should reflect the character of God.

The Motive: "In the fear of God."

The attitude with which we pursue the holy life is not the unhealthy fear one would hold for a ruthless tyrant or a bully. Rather, it is a deep and healthy reverence for the all–powerful, multi–faceted God who holds all things in His hand, yet who has chosen to bless us in spite of our sin and rebellion. He is the God who is angered by our sin, but loves us in spite of it; the God who has the power to chastise and discipline us in this life, but does so only becauseHe cares so deeply for us; the God who has the power to destroy, but delights in giving life.

Why, then, do we pursue holiness? Because we are so overwhelmed by who God is and what He has done for us. We pursue it because it is the only proper response to the God who has taken us to be His children and freed us from the death–grip of sin. He is an awesome God who inspires holiness in His people.

This text speaks directly to a complaint that is commonly heard these days, and it is the complaint that "we are losing our distinctiveness." At the heart of the complaint is that there are many these days who are willing to surrender many of the doctrinal distinctives that clearly separate us from other religious groups. That may be true in some cases, but when we go to the Scriptures we find that the call is for a distinctiveness of an altogether different nature. As 2 Corinthians 7:1 reveals, we are to be distinctive in the *lifestyle* we maintain as the people of God.

While there may be reason to be concerned with some of the shifts taking place in our historical stance as a religious movement, there is far more reason to be concerned with our failure to clearly and consistently maintain individual and collective holiness as the people of God in the midst of a dying world. The divorce rate in the church continues to move closer to the national average. Evangelism in the church as a whole is barely at the break–even point. Apathy and complacency continue to plague our congregations. Sexual immorality is far more of a problem than we were once willing to admit. Radical commitment to Jesus Christ is in most places the exception rather than the rule. Yes, we are indeed losing our distinctiveness. It is getting harder and harder to distinguish the people of God from the people of the world! A fundamental lack of holiness is cause for greater concern than anything else in the modern church.

From Second Corinthians we learn that it is our mission to go out into the world, persuading men and women to be reconciled to God through Christ. And as we go about that ministry, we are called to maintain our distinction as the people of God, a distinction made evident by the way that we live. Purity of heart and life is the hallmark of that distinctiveness, motivated by the sheer awsomeness of our God. Let us go forth as heralds of the gospel of reconciliation, but as we do so, let us not forget who we are and how we are to live.

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On Bows and Christians........

Jim Mullican

One of the stories which has come down to us from the early church concerns the apostle John. When John was an old man, he lived in Ephesus and spent his time strengthening the churches in Asia. But according to the story, John had a pet pigeon and each afternoon would sit on his doorstep in the cool of the day, playing with his pet. Some of the younger Christians were scandalized. Here was the last living apostle of Jesus wasting his time playing with a bird! So, as our habit is, they appointed a committee to go and tell John how they felt. He listened to them patiently and then said quietly, "The bow cannot always be bent."

Anyone who has ever owned a bow knows that this is true. If a bow is left strung and under constant tension, it soon loses its strength. It must be unstrung and rested often in order to retain its effectiveness. I ruined the first bow I ever owned due to ignorance of this fact. After a few weeks, it would shoot only a short distance. A few years later, I made another bow in a high school shop class, but because I had no confidence in it, it was never strung and used. Itwas even more useless to me than the first one.

There is an application to all this, especially at this time of the year. The application is this: we all need times of recreation and relaxation, times when the bow is unstrung. A week off every three months would work wonders for most people, but vacation time is usually somewhat less than that. Christians need some time to spend fishing, camping, golfing, or doing something else to relax and relieve tension. After the twelve returned from their preaching mission, Jesus told them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

On the other hand, we must not be like the bow that was never strung. Jesus said as He sent out seventy others, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). The kingdom of God needs workers, and there is much that each of us can do.

Let us say with Isaiah, "Here am I! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). Even an unstrung bow is still a bow and can be ready for service on a moment's notice. This should be true of the Christian as well. Whether at home or on vacation, we are still Christians. Let us never forget that.

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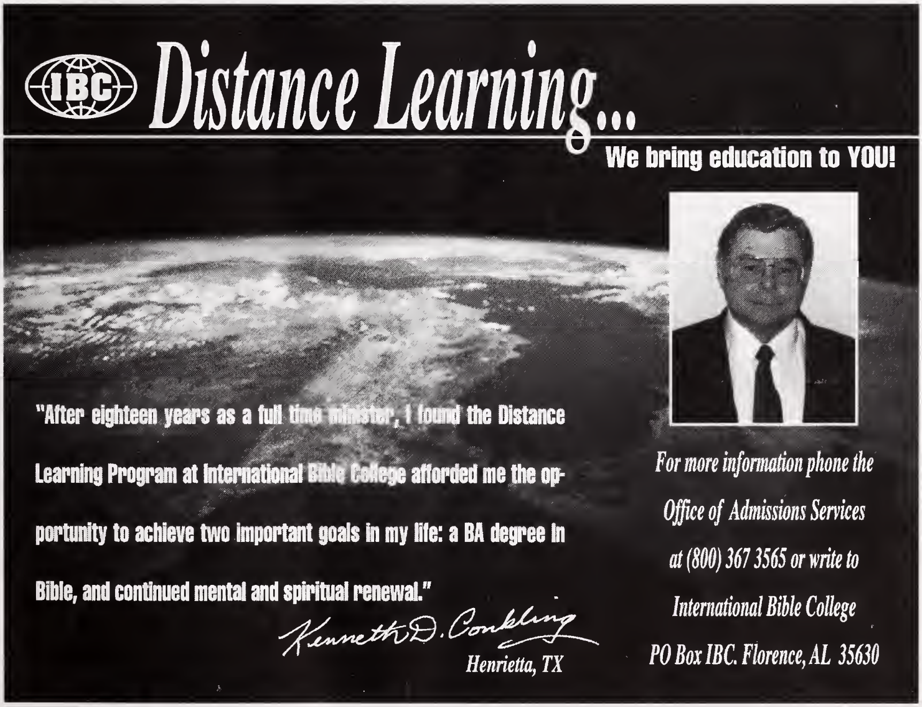
What is This I Hear?

RITA WATSON

It was a beautiful Carolina blue cloudless day. It was also a day when I had a list of errands as long as my arm, and if there's one thing I've learned while living in the Carolinas it is this: if it's not raining, mow! So, I left the house, having given to our two teenage daughters one instruction—to mow the lawn while I was gone. It seemed simple enough.

Half–way through my list I realized that I would have to return to the house. As I pulled into the driveway I thought, "The grass doesn't look any shorter." The bass beat of the music could be felt, no only heard, as I walked up the steps to the door. Inside, the kitchen sparkled and the dishwasher hummed. As I walked into the living room the lemon scent of furniture polish wafted toward me. But why was the grass not mowed? In reply to that question I received from my daughters a list of all the wonderful things that had been done so far that day. The living room straightened, the floors swept, the bathroom cleaned, the eternal dusting done, the laundry was going. But why wasn't the lawn mowed? Well, they just didn't want to mow the lawn.



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Suddenly I heard the voice of Samuel say, "What, then, is this bleating of the sheep in my ears?" (I Samuel 15:14).

Like Saul of old, my girls had seen fit to alter the one simple instruction in order to make it pleasing to themselves. They probably even felt that they were doing what was right and necessary—that they had "obeyed the voice"—because they were doing what had been commanded on past occasions.

It wasn't that the other things were wrong. It certainly wasn't that they were not necessary or needful. But what I wanted above all else was obedience. Simple obedience. All of the "gifts" they laid at my feet could not make up for their willful disobedience.

> "All of the 'gifts' they laid at my feet could not make up for their willfull disobedience."

I wish I could adequately express the "bolt of lightning" I felt that day when I realized that our Heavenly Parent is the same way. What He wants from us is simple obedience. Obedience is the evidence of our faith in and love for the Father (James 2:18; John 14:15). Obedience is what keeps us within His will where His blessings my be enjoyed. Obedience is the sign that we truly"hear" the voice of the Lord.

It does not matter if we don't understand the why of the command. It does not matter if we think the command does not fit our culture. It does not matter if the command seems odd to us. What the Father wants is obedience.

We must be honest with ourselves. We need to ask: "What is it that is neglected among the things God has commanded? What is it that is put aside until a more convenient time? To what have we turned a deaf ear and a blind eye?" Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that *all* God's commands must be done, not just the ones they preferred (Matthew 23:23). So, too, with us. We must ask ourselves, "What is left undone?"

The answer will probably be something different for each of us, but chances are there is something that we simply don't like to do and we have made excuses. "It's not my gift." "I don't know how." "I didn't understand the instruction." "I don't have time." Or, "Surely that's not what God really expects of me!"

If we are to stay within the will of the Father and to experience the abundant life, we must be obedient. Saul lost his kingdom and the Spirit of God for his willful disobedience. We could be in danger of losing our eternal life and all His gifts in this world, no matter how seemingly well intentioned our willful disobedience may be.

It was a beautiful Carolina blue day and in the end it really didn't matter if the grass got mowed that day, for this mother learned a valuable lesson. Obedience is "better than sacrifice and to hearken better than fat of rams."

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. . . Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

PAUL JARRETT

Blasphemy in a general sense refers to reviling or contemptuous speech. In Scripture it is used almost exclusively to refer to speech that if defamatory of the Divine Majesty: God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) Jesus has this to say about blasphemy:

"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come" (Matthew 13:31-32).

Jesus' statement that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable has led many people to ask three questions. First, what is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Second, why is it unforgivable? Finally, can a person commit this sin today, and in doing so leave themselves with no hope of forgiveness?

In regard to the first question, it should be noted that we have no actual example in Scripture of someone who committed this sin. What we do have is an account of what led Jesus to issue this warning in the first

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place. In Mark's account we are told that Jesus gave this warning "because they were saying, 'He (Jesus) has an unclean spirit.' " In both Matthew and Mark we see that this warning is issued in a context in which Jesus' critics are attributing the miracles He wasperforming to the power of Beelzebub. From this we may conclude that blaspheming the Holy Spirit involves speaking contemptuously of His power, even to the point of attributing it to Satan.

In order to understand why this sin would be unforgivable, we need to consider the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus described the role of the Spirit in this way:

"And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:8-11).

In simplest terms, the work of the Holy Spirit is that of producing conviction. When Jesus warned His critics about the danger of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, He did so because He knew that if they persisted in attributing His ability to perform miracles to the power of Beelzebub, they were in danger of moving beyond the power of the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and call them to righteousness.

Jesus realized that the works He was doing by the power of the Holy Spirit were the most powerful witness to His identity (see John 5:36; 10:37-38). When His enemies attributed these works to the Devil, they were in danger of moving beyond the influence of the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and call them to repentance.

The question of whether or not a person can blaspheme the Holy Spirit today is a difficult one to answer. Some have said "no" since the Holy Spirit is no longer using miraculous signs to call men to repentance. However, this assumes that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is linked solely to the miraculous manifestation of His presence. I believe this view fails to take into account the role the Spirit continues to play by producing conviction through the inspired word, pricking people in their hearts, as He did on Pentecost (Acts 2:37).

Texts such as Hebrews 6:4-6 and I John 5:16 indicate that there were those who could remove themselves completely from the power of the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and lead them to repentance. However, it should also be noted that in both of these texts the problem is not with God's ability to forgive, but with the inability, or unwillingness, on the part of those who have rejected the Spirit to be moved to repentance.

For those who ask if the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed so as to make it impossible for them to find forgiveness no matter how much they desire it, the answer is a resounding "NO!" This can be stated with confidence because the very fact that they are being moved to seek forgiveness is proof that they have not blasphemed the Holy Spirit, since it is the influence of the Spirit which is convicting them of sin and calling them to repentance in the first place.

One question that some may raise pertains to what is said in Hebrews 12:15-17 regarding Esau's inability to find a place of repentance after he sold his birthright, though he sought it with tears. The message of this text is *not* about God's *ability* to forgive. Rather, it is about the *place* where forgiveness is found. Esau's birthright is a type (or foreshadowing) of Christ, who is the Christians's birthright. The author of Hebrews is making the point that if the disciples to whom he was writing turn their backs on Jesus they would, like Esau, forfeit the blessing of their inheritance in Christ, our birthright.

If you are convicted by your sins, if you are under conviction regarding the righteousness to be found in Christ, and if you are convicted regarding your need to prepare for judgment, then you need not fear that you have committed the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. To the contrary, it is your sensitivity to the message of the Holy Spirit which is producing those convictions. You may be confident of the forgiveness and acceptance that are yours in the Christ whom the Holy Spirit has made known to you in the inspired word. Those who have truly blasphemed the Holy Spirit will not be aware of their folly until they face in judgment the Lord whom they have scorned.

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Word Games

Mark Hudson

I love the comics. Most of the Sunday paper is just packing material for the comic section. The retirement of Gary Larson from "The Far Side" was a personal loss only partially compensated by my discovery of "Dilbert." Many cartoons make us laugh at ourselves, and some make us revisit great truths about life. For instance, one cartoon I recently saw showed a little boy on Santa's lap. The boy was saying, "Define 'good.' "

Word games are nothing new. Once a man approached Jesus and called Him "good teacher." Jesus even asked, "Why do you call me good?" But the real question the man had was about commandments. Which was the most important? "Love God," Jesus responded, and "love your neighbor as yourself" was the second greatest commandment. Seeking to justify himself, the man asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Do you see the word game? By narrowly defining "neighbor" one can be neighborly to only a select few. Jesus defined "neighbor" by telling the parable of the good Samaritan.

The practice of justifying oneself, or redefining sin, has developed into a fine art these days. Our society is full of euphemisms designed to take the "sin" out of sin. Here are a few examples. People no longer lie; they exercise "spin control." Pride is now "self–confidence." Profanity, obscenity and vulgarity are now revered as "protected speech," while calling something sin is "hate speech." Immorality without disease is "safe sex." Homosexuality has gone from unnatural to "alternative lifestyle." Neo–definitions link Kervorkian's murders with "mercy."

To justify sin, our society continues the word games. Sinners are now "victims." Buck–passing has replaced accountability. Although some admit to having made mistakes, sin has disappeared from our collective conscience. I'm reminded of the words of Ezekiel: *"They have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the clean and the unclean"* (22:26).

Mark Hudson preaches for the Whiskey Rd. congregation in Aiken, SC. He can be contacted at 2006 Whiskey Road, Aiken SC 29803 or by e–mail: mrhudfam@aol.com.

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Elders Lead Rescue Mission

Lewis C. Forrest, Jr.

This second article in our series addresses a situation of grave concern in the church of the Lord in the 1990's. It's time to seriously consider that God expects of elders and how we who are not elders are to help them carry out their God–given work.

Have you noticed that God doesn't give many instruction specifically to elders? Most of what we know about elders we surmise by defining Greek words and watching sketchy examples in the New Testament. We also look to the accounts of Jewish elders for examples ofhow they made decisions and acted on behalf of God's people.

God expects us to consider the parallels He provided to teach us about the roles of elders and to teach us our roles in working under their oversight. God compared His church to a flock of sheep and His elders to faithful shepherds (Acts 20:28). He then used Himself and parables time and again to show how a faithful shepherd should behave.

Common sense tells us that unconfined sheep will wander away much the same as unsecured boats go adrift. Left to their own devices, Christians wander away and end up on the wide road that leads to their destruction. This principle is so plain that it is likely to confuse those among us who think they are wise.

> "Let elders everywhere recognize that the work God has given them to do is the work of shepherding."

No matter how long a Christian is a child of God, the sins of the past are as near as our imagination. A sin committed years ago is as close as a sin committed yesterday because our minds compress time. Our thoughts can carry us back to some sinful experience. If we're not careful, these flights of fancy—these moments of distraction—could lead us to wander again. We ascend to the roofs of our minds, looking over into the next courtyard to see something that entices us. We lust after it, knowing all along we should not have it. Before we even realize it our mind is telling us it's okay, and the lust soon gives birth to action. We engage in something we know is wrong and spiritually destructive.

In some cases we might stop, pulling up short of the larger sin. But the point is, we find it too easy to wander from the safety of God's fold. And when Christians do wander, we must remember that each is a precious lamb of God and deserves to be sought after and rescued. We must never neglect any Christian who wanders away.

Implicit in the function of elders as shepherds is the responsibility to go out and find those who have wandered away and bring them back, no matter what personal sacrifices might be necessary to accomplish the task. Jesus demonstrated how it is to be done when He presented the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:12-14. He said that the shepherd *put the lost sheep on his shoulders and brought him back to the fold.* Jesus never mentioned delegating the responsibility to anyone else (such as a deacon or a visitation committee today). He never mentioned assigning the task to anyone else (such as the preacher). Rather, it was the specific function of the shepherd.

If shepherds today are functioning properly, the sheep will know the voice of their shepherds and will respond when approached. Most will welcome the unconditional love of shepherds who are willing to pick them up out of the sin in which they are entangled and return them to the sheepfold.

Let elders everywhere recognize that the work God has given them is the work of shepherding. It is not the work of a business executive. It is not the work of a board of directors. It is not the work of a total quality team. It is simply the humble work of a shepherd.

The elders' work is not to be tied up in budgeting. It's not to be focused on building buildings. It's not setting salaries for preachers. It's not the hands on task of managing the investment of surplus funds. It's the work of shepherding.

In overseeing the work of the church, elders today often find themselves burdened with the tedious tasks of administration: buried in budgets, steeped in salaries, frustrated with facilities, hindered by heating plants, perplexed over padded pews, and distracted with decisions that have little or nothing to do with the ordained work of shepherding. Too many shepherds have stopped tending the flock and are overwhelmed with tasks of their own invention. They need to step back and let other capable Christians take care of the administrative matters so that they can devote themselves fully to God's real business of guarding, feeding and watching over fragile sheep; the business exemplified by the Great Shepherd Himself.

The sheep that wandered away didn't mean to become lost. He was tempted by lush grass, a natural inclination toward curiosity, or the lure of some far away object. He did not set out to be rebellious. He didn't intend any harm by his actions. He was not making a statement about the shepherds themselves. He simply gave in to the temptation and found himself lost.

It's no accident that Christ chose sheep and shepherds to describe the relationship between elders and their flock. We *are* like sheep and elders are not doing their jobs unless they're doing their best to keep the flock—all the flock—together all of the time. When one soul wanders away, the good shepherd will leave the rest of the flock in a safe place and go after the lost sheep in an effort to restore that one to safety. The good shepherd understands the value of each soul and does whatever it takes through the power of the Holy Spirit who works within to save one who has wandered away and is about to be eternally lost.

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Whom Do You Fear?

PETER RODE

A soldier was standing at attention during a parade drill when he waved to one of the spectators. The drill instructor went over to the young man and growled, "Soldier, don't ever do that again!" But as his company marched past the reviewing stand the young soldier waved a second time. When the troops got back to the barracks, the drill instructor barreled in and barked at the soldier, "I told you not to wave! Aren't you afraid of me?" "Yes sir," the private replied, "but you don't know my mother!"

Peter and John had upset the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin was disturbed by the miracle they had performed at the gate of the temple (Acts 3) and the message they preached about the resurrection of Jesus. The Saducees did not believe in this doctrine and were offended by it. The disciples had to be stopped! So, Peter and John were arrested and thrown into jail. By human reasoning they had every reason to be afraid. Yet, the next day they stood up to their accusers with great courage. "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God," they boldly said (Acts 4:19). Their answer demonstrated that they feared God more than they feared their persecutors, a truth that was not totally lost on the Sanhedrin. "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

> **"WE CAN ACT AND SPEAK WITH CONVICTION BECAUSE WE KNOW OUR GOD IS WITH US."**

Sometimes we're tempted to remain quiet when we should speak up on behalf of Christ. Sometimes we do nothing when we should stand up for Jesus and His cause. We're afraid of what others might say, or what their reaction will be. We fear retribution. We assume it will be unpleasant, so we shy away from doing or saying what is right.

We become cowards. Timothy seemed to have had the same problem in his life, so Paulencouraged him to "fan into flame the gift of God…for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self–discipline" (2 Timothy 1:6-7). We must remember that, through His Spirit who indwells us, God will give us the courage stand up for Him. We can act and speak with conviction because we know our God is with us. His authority outranks all others. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

There is a song that goes, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord nor to defend His cause…" I hope you mean what you say when you sing these words. I urge you, that when you get into a situation that calls for courage, to remember biblical characters like Joseph, Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The Lord, our Lord, was with them and protected them. Surely He will protect us too! When you fear God, you have nothing else to fear.

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A Column For Youth

The eXpress Files: Where is God?

JEFF LOVITT

Where is God? That depends on who's asking! To the *atheist*, "where God is" has to be framed in terms of Christian evidences. To the *philosopher*, such a question is merely a point of debate. To the *sufferer*, "where God is" has to be answered in reference to pain.

But what if you are sixteen years old with your life ahead of you, a set of wheels under you, and your childhood behind you? Is it relevant to ask, "Where is God?" Yes! But the perspective changes again. The question for you does not concern proof of existence, explanation of essence, or a demand for justice. Rather, "Where is God?" has more to do with *power* and *presence*.

"*Every*-*one* has a crowd that is important to them."

At a time when hormones rage through your system, and power is spelled "5.0 L-I-T-E-R E-N-G-I-N-E"; when presence means having the boy or girl of your dreams recognize that you exist, the question of where God is becomes a power question. Consider Luke 3:1-2:

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness."

Notice the repeated emphasis on power: "...the *reign* of Tiberius," "Pontius Pilate...*governor* of Judea," "Herod was *tetrarch*," "Philip was *tetrarch*...," "Lysanias was *tetrarch*," "in the *high priesthood* of Annas and Caiaphas." These verses are filled with people who held great civil power! Emperors, governors, rulers, high priests! Kingdoms, provinces, cities—circles of influence!

But in all of that, where is the word of God? "The word of God came to John...in the wilderness." Not in the city. Not at the capital. Not in the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Not where big men sit on thrones and powerful men exert influence; where who you know, where you go, what you wear and how you act will get you in with the right crowd.

No, the word of God came in the quiet place where a man brave enough to set himself apart from the crowd drew a crowd to himself (Luke 3:7). Surely there is a lesson here. This is not just parental paranoia. *Everyone* has a crowd that is important to them. Even parents. The question is, are you going to follow one or lead one? You have to realize that greatness is not found where most people expect to find it. You have to go where the word of God is. And if you will go there, God will come to you. Then, you will be the one establishing peer pressure instead of receiving it.

"...The crowds...were coming out to be baptized by him" (Luke 3:7).

Jeff Lovitt preaches for the Biltmore Church of Christ, PO Box 5651, Asheville, NC 28813.

Testing the Boundaries

AMOS ALLEN

How radical should we be as Christians living in a pagan world? How fanatical, how serious, how extreme are we to be as children of God? What minimal level of commitment will it take to gain entrance into heaven? What amount should be given? How many meetings are to be attended?

And what degree of holiness is required? Can I drink alcohol as long as I don't get drunk? Can I say the "soft" cuss words and still be okay? Is it acceptable to look at the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue as long as I avoid the hard pornography?

Asking questions like these are what I call "exploring the boundaries." At times, we need to ask these type of questions, but what is our purpose in asking them? If it is to know how much we can act like the unbeliever and still be a Christian, then we have clearly misunderstood the claim Jesus makes on our lives. Also, staying on the edge is a clear sign that we are still unconvinced of, and unmoved by, the goodness and power of God.

In Luke 13:5 Jesus said, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." That's what God expects of us: repentance. We all need to realize our lack of dedication and abandon the mindset that allows us to compromise and rationalize. In Luke 13:6-9 Jesus also tells us what we can expect from God: patience. He is patiently waiting for us to turn toward Him and bear fruit in our lives.

I suppose it is human nature to find ourselves messing around with the boundaries of God's love for us (He certainly knows how fickle we are). Yet, we should also expect to find ourselves moving closer to the heart and mind of God (we know how good He is) instead of living on the edge. Psalm 73 helps us here.

The singer/poet knows the traditional view of God: He is good to the pure in heart (73:1). And yet, experience suggests that the impure in heart also seem to do quite well for themselves, enjoying the good things of life, and they obviously aren't concerned with what God thinks (73:3-11). The faith of the psalmist is being challenged. He is tempted to move away from God and toward what seems to be working. The wicked seem to be on to something; they have a system that works, despite what the writer had learned in Bible class. But then, something happens. He goes to the sanctuary and God is rediscovered (73:17). He understands that God is still God and that what he learned in Bible class is true after all: the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will be blessed. It may not be obvious right now, but that is how it will be. After walking on the edge of his faith and commitment, he turns back to the center and confesses that nothing is better than being surrounded by God (73:21-28).

So, how radical, how extreme are we to be? It is not trite to answer, "Jesus is our example." Does He have anything to say or teach us about radical faith? You can bet your life on it.

Amos Allen preaches for the Meadowbrook Rd. church in Asheboro. He can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27023.

The Church and the Word.....

Ron Newberry

“Is it any wonder that mainline churches are losing members by the thousands?... Until Christ is allowed to be the Lord of the church and until the Holy Scriptures are accepted as God’s final Word for mankind to live by, there will be a continual exodus away from those unscriptural denominations.”

What firebrand among us wrote that? What astute observer noted the exodus from denominationalism and attributed it to the error fostered by mainline churches? What keen witted prognosticator in our fellowship determined that the cure for what ails the religious world is a deliberate move back toward Scripture? Answer: no one among us.

> “The scriptures are to be the final word of authority on matters pertaining to eternal things.”

The above quote was taken from an article in the April, 1998 issue of the *American Family Association Journal.* A. J. Johnson, a retired United Methodist pastor, wrote it. He was lamenting the production of a video series called *“Questions of Faith”* that features some of the most liberal and radical theologians in our world today. The list includes men and women who deny the virgin birth of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and that God is a personal deity who revealed Himself through Jesus. Some don’t believe that God is eternal and express belief that God is just one power among many. In addition to these beliefs, they advocate that homosexuals be ordained to their denomination.

The bottom line is that they rarely ever point to Jesus as a personal and ever–present God who offers solutions to mankind’s problems. The call to sexual purity and eternal life are given little if any space in their theology. To quote Mr. Johnson again, “How sad it is to see the denominations that God raised up to lead people to him for saving grace undermine the key beliefs that are essential to authentic Christianity.” I would add one more line to that sentiment. How sad it is to see the denominations that have arisen that have led people away from the unity for which Jesus prayed.

However, I share one important conviction with Mr. Johnson. The scriptures should be the final word of authority on matters pertaining to eternal things. While he laments the exodus from mainline churches, I would maintain that there *should* be an exodus from *any* church that does not accept and live by the holy word of God.

We might pause to ask, “Why are they leaving in droves?” The answer is, the average person in the pew wants to worship and work where God’s word is honored and God is not slandered.

What an exciting time we live in. We have an opportunity to reach out to those who are leaving mainline churches and are looking for a place where the word of God is treasured as the source of all truth relating to life and godliness.

“God, grant us the courage and the desire to let those folks know about your simple truth that we are saved by your grace through our faith and that they are welcome to join us as we strive to walk daily with Jesus.”

Ron Newberry ministers to the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at the church address, 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

— MARK HUDSON

GREENSBORO, NC...

The Friendly Ave. church will be hosting a seminar entitled "Love, Sex and Marriage," July 24-25. The seminar will be conducted by Joe Beam. The cost is $30 per couple. For information, or to register, call the church office at (336) 292-7649. Friendly Ave. also celebrated its 30th anniversary on July 12 with a special service.

ANDERSON, SC...

The Westside church of Christ is in the process of securing a new preacher. *Darrell Clark*, their previous minister, is now engaged in military active duty as a chaplain following a productive ministry at Westside. Anyone interested in applying for this position should write the church at 600 Pearman Dairy Rd., Anderson, SC 29625; or contact Marvin Lain at (803) 287-3751.

ABILENE, TX...

It has been learned that *Jim Mankin*, who is a member of the faculty at Abilene Christian University, is suffering from colon cancer. Prior to his move to Abilene, brother Mankin served as pulpit minister at the Madison church of Christ in Madison, TN. Madison is the largest congregation among churches of Christ. He also serves as Director of the Blue Ridge Encampment, a family encampment that is conducted annually in Black Mountain, NC. However, he was not able to attend this year because of his condition. We ask our readers to join together in prayer for our brother.

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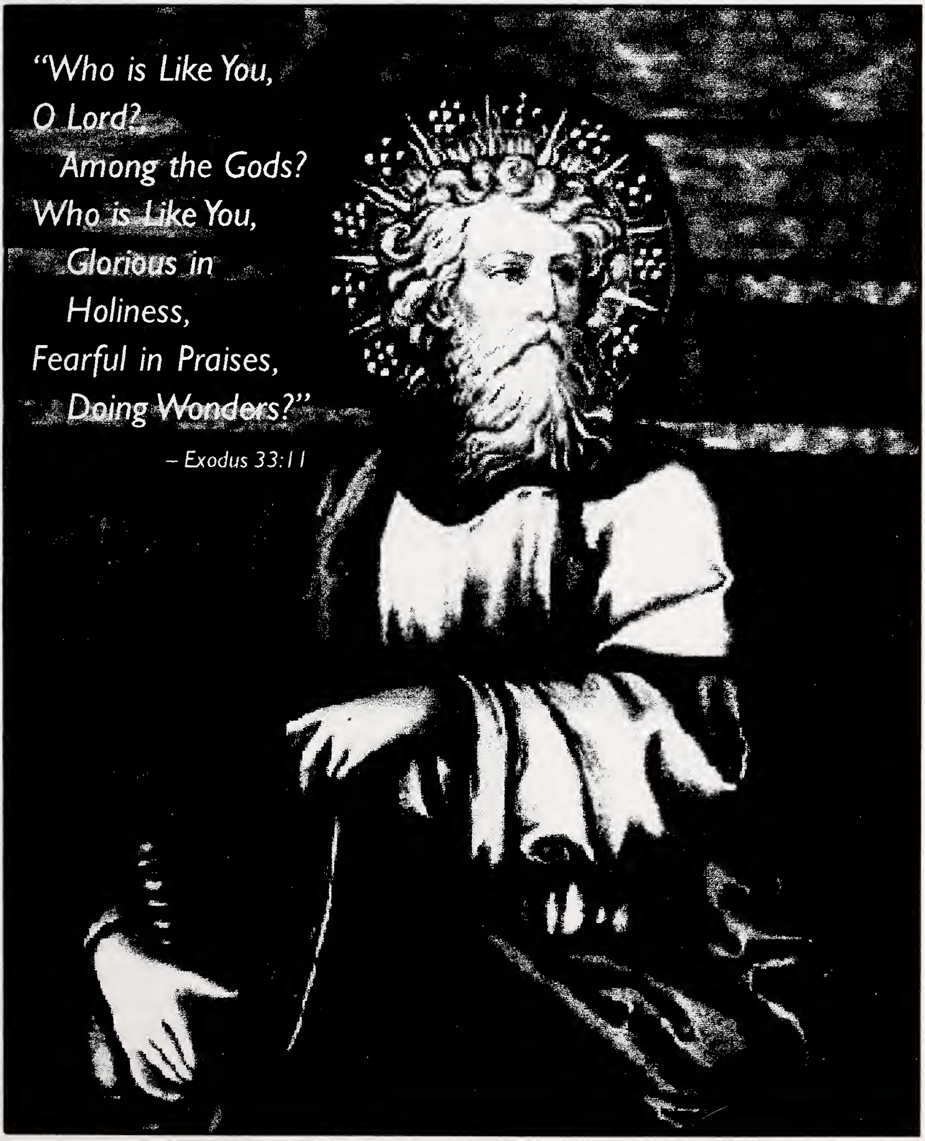

"Who is Like You,
O Lord?
Among the Gods?
Who is Like You,
Glorious in
Holiness,
Fearful in Praises,
Doing Wonders?"

– Exodus 33:11

CAROLINA christian

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The Glory of God

DENNIS CONNER

I read recently about a little girl named Schia. She had always been told by her parents that she came from God. When she was 4, her baby brother was born. Schia began to ask her parents to give her some time alone with her new little brother. They were afraid that she might not be gentle enough, so they said no. Over time, however, she showed no signs of jealousy, so the parents changed their minds and let Schia have her private conference with the baby. Overjoyed, Schia went into the baby's room and shut the door; however, it was opened a bit by her parents, who watched and listened cautiously. Schia walked quietly up to her baby brother, put her face close to his and said, "Baby, tell me what God feels like. I'm starting to forget."

Oftentimes in our lives we find it too easy to forget what God feels like; we too easily lose sight and sense of His presence. So how can we regain the awareness of God's presence in our lives? And what assurances do we have that He really is dwelling among us? An incident that occurred during the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites may hold some answers for us.

In Exodus 33:12-23 we find a conversation between Moses and the Lord. The conversation followed the golden calf incident that had occurred while Moses was still on Mt. Sinai receiving the law. In response to their idolatry, the Lord had threatened to remove His presence from among the people (33:2-3). He would still give them the land He had promised, for God is faithful even when His children are not. However, He would no longer dwell in their midst. Rather, He would send an angel to be His agent. The response of the people to this news was one of mourning.

> *And sometimes in the midst of the uncertainties of life and mired deep in the guilt of our sin, we cry out to God, "Let me see You! Show me Your glory!"*

In the conversation that followed, in which Moses made a passionate plea on behalf of his countrymen, he said in essence, "Look, Lord, I don't want to do this thing if you aren't going to go with me. You said that I have found favor in Your sight. Have I or haven't I? You said once that this nation is Your people. Are they or aren't they? If your presence isn't going to be with us, then leave us right here." For Moses, an angel was not enough. What was the point in going onward if God was not going with them? The Lord's answer was, "You have found favor in my sight," and He assured Moses of two things: His presence and His rest (v. 14).

Then Moses responded with a remarkable request, "I ask of You, show me Your glory!" He wanted to be done with his uncertainties and questions. He wanted God to seal His promise by showing him all of His glory. Moses wanted to see all that there is of God. The Lord agreed, but cautioned, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (v. 20). Why this restriction? Very simply, because of the sheer awesomeness of His majesty and holiness and the sin and unworthiness of man. Man simply is not capable of seeing God in the fullness of His glory and surviving the experience!

The Lord sought to protect Moses by putting him down into a depression in a rock and covering his vision until the divine glory had passed by, allowing Moses only a glimpse of His passing glory. And as He passed by the Lord proclaimed His name to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious..." (34:6). So it was that God allowed Moses to see His back and hear His name. We don't know exactly what Moses saw and experienced that day, but it must have been the most deeply religious experience of his life, for his immediate response was to hurriedly bow down on the ground and worship. Now he knew that the presence of God would go with them, and that the Lord had forgiven Israel of her sin.

This incident holds some powerful implications for our own experience of God's glory and presence. Like Israel and like Moses, we too have our moments of uncertainty and questioning. We too sin against the God who has been so good and gracious to us. And sometimes in the midst of the uncertainties of life and mired deep in the guilt of our sin, we cry out to God, "Let me see You! Show me Your glory!" We, like Moses, need to know that God has not abandoned us. We need some assurance of His presence and forgiveness. And God answers us by showing us something of His awesome glory. And how is that?

It is significant to note in this text that the glory and presence of God are linked to His name (33:19; 34:6-7). God's name represents who He is and what He does. Who is He? He is the merciful and gracious God, the longsuffering Father who abounds in goodness and truth. And what has He done? He has kept mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, dispensing justice to those who will not repent of their guilt. Thus, the real glory of God is not only seen in a form, but also in the experience of His gracious mercy and divine compassion. As someone has correctly observed, "Grace is the real evidence of the glory and presence of God."

So how do I know that God is present in my life? You know it when you sin and in a penitent spirit seek the forgiveness of God—and He does! You know it when you hear the story of the cross and are overwhelmed by the love the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts (Romans 5:5). Grace. Mercy. Forgiveness. Compassion. That's what God feels like. That's the glory of God.

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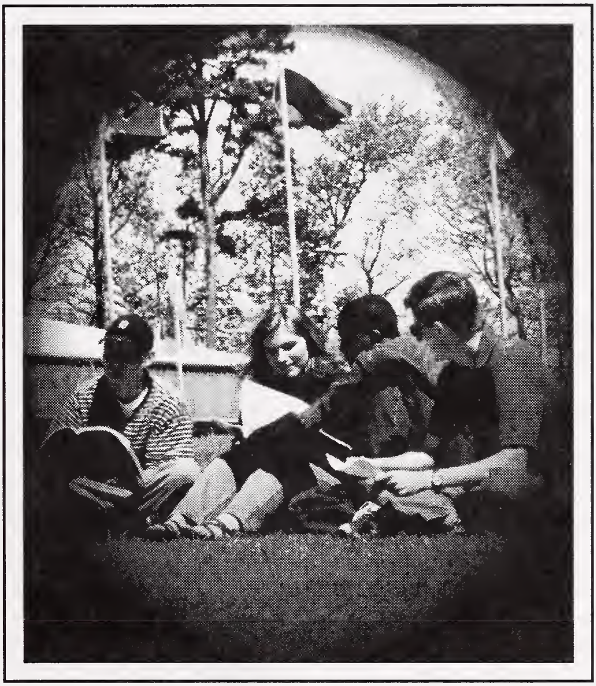

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Contentment

Jim Mullican

Most of us are pretty content with our lives. Oh, we'd change a few things, perhaps—have more time to relax, have a little more money, shed a few pounds, have a bigger house or a nicer car—but we're generally satisfied. If not, we do a pretty good job of hiding it.

It's easy to become comfortable with the same routine. Most of us start the week by attending worship and Bible class on Sunday morning. About half of us return on Sunday night. Monday through Friday we go to work, read the newspapers and magazines, pay bills, watch TV, and perhaps indulge in a hobby. Saturday is perhaps more flexible. We may use it for yardwork, housework, fishing, shopping, gardening, or sleeping late. Oh yes, probably fewer than half attended Bible class on Wednesday night. Many others never even gave it a thought.

LET US NOT FORGET THAT THIS LIFE IS ONLY THE "TRIAL RUN"...

So the weeks roll by—week after week, year after year. We become fairly content with the routine. Life is generally good, and we expect it to continue that way. It's easy to be complacent and spiritually drowsy, but we dare not be. Second Peter 3:10-14 contains words of caution and reminder, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming...So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him."

Let us not forget that this life is only the "trial run" to determine where we are suited to live in eternity—heaven or hell. Let us use the time and opportunities wisely. As the apostle Paul advised, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Congratulations Amy

All of us at *Carolina Christian* extend our heartfelt congratulation to our own Amy Love, who was married to Kevin Savage on May 16, 1998 in Greensboro, NC. Amy serves as Design Editor for *Carolina Christian*, freely offering hours of her time each month to the design and layout of the magazine. Her gifts have been a great blessing to this ministry. Amy and Kevin have recently moved to Augusta, GA. Our prayers and wishes for a wonderful life together are with them both!

The God-Ordained Work of Elders: Prevent Drifting

Lewis Forrest

Editor's Note: The following article, first in a series of three, should have appeared in the June issue. Due to what was apparently a problem of miscommunication with the company that does our printing for us, the article was dropped in the typesetting process. We apologize for any confusion this might have caused to our readers.

When a congregation selects elders to lead in the Lord's church we must remember that we are not elevating men to a position of rank. Rather, we are appointing men to a work; a God–ordained work. The function of the eldership is often misunderstood and abused, even among those of us who so diligently seek to be the church we read about in the New Testament. To help us focus on the real work of elders, I want to consider three very important roles of elders in this series. The first role is that of *the prevention of drifting Christians.* The second is *rescuing those who leave the flock.* And the third role is that of *standing between the flock and danger.* It should be understood that all three fall under the fundamental responsibility of elders to watch out for the souls of those who are entrusted to their care (Acts 20:28). This first article will deal with the problem of drifting Christians.

In Hebrews 2:1 the writer warns, "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away." He then indicates that the way to avoid drifting is by focusing attention on the word revealed through Christ and those who heard Him. While it is understood that the letter of Hebrews was addressed to a group of Christians and not expressly to elders, the elders should still lead the way and be the role models in helping believers to remain steadfast.

I understand drifting. I was raised on the coast of North Carolina and we almost always had a small boat for fishing and other water–related activities. I learned at an early age that if you failed to secure the boat, it would easily drift away. Chances were that it would get into deep water and you would have to swim to retrieve it. After hurricanes passed our coastline we would hear of boats being found miles from where they were supposed to be because a strong wind had broken them loose from their moorings and carried them adrift to some new destination. Some owners never recovered their boats as someone else simply laid claim to them, changed their identifying marks, and kept them for their own.

Does this sound familiar to the pattern of some Christian's lives? We see those who have professed Christ drift away from their first love, leave the truth of the gospel, and forsake their original owner, even though they were bought for a huge price.

Drifting could also occur when things were relatively calm. When there was a storm we would batten down the hatch and place a second or third line on the boat. An eye would be kept on the boat throughout the storm because it was worth protecting.

By contrast, some would (and still do) become complacent when the weather was beautiful. In good weather, when things are calm, it's easy to think that it will be all right just to nose the bow of the boat up against the shore and not tie it at all. After all, there's no apparent threat. And then what a surprise to return and find that the boat has drifted away!

Christians, like boats, can sometimes drift away when the leadership is complacent about the dangers of drifting. The Master of the sea has warned them that a storm is always brewing just over the horizon. Meanwhile, the great deceiver sometimes convinces leaders that they will have plenty of time to secure the boat if a serious storm should arise or a strong wind come up. They then find themselves guilty of waiting until a problem is inevitable before taking any preventive action. They tell themselves that the boat will not drift away. After all, they have treated the boat this way for years and it's never drifted away before! Why should they be overly concerned about it drifting now?

Elders have a special responsibility for guarding the church so that we will not drift away. They are responsible for helping us appreciate the church and the benefits to be realized by staying firmly connected to the body of Christ. Elders secure the lines and batten down the hatches by sound teaching and consistent, Christ–like examples. They are placed before the congregation as role models of spiritual stability. They are to be active in the lives of each Christian in the congregation and are to be constantly teaching and equipping. The elders will be held accountable for regularly checking the security of the anchors.

Christ is our anchor in the storm of life, but if we're not careful, we can become unattached and drift into danger. Our elders are to take special care to make sure that no one drifts away. That's a crucial role of the overseer of the Master's possessions. While it may sometimes be a thankless task in the present world, the faithful overseer will be rewarded in the world to come.

Lewis Forrest is a member of the Greenville, NC church where he has served as an elder. He is a management consultant and Executive Director of the Mattamuskeet Foundation. He can be contacted at 4377 Lewis Lane, Ayden, NC 28513.

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"Excellence" is Theme of September Evangelism Seminar

EDDIE WOODHOUSE

What is happening to America's families? As millions watch daytime TV shows promising a fight each episode, families are seen willing to reach a shocking low as they proudly describe their broken relationships.

Closer to home, marriages are crumbling. Children are often confused about what is right and what is wrong. Job uncertainty only adds to the stress. It seems there are no longer high expectations for our families. Isn't there a better way?

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Feeding Your Soul

DENNIS CONNER

You are what you eat. That's what the experts keep telling us. Eat junk food, get a junky body. Eat healthy food, healthy body. Watch the calories. Cut the fat intake. Good cholesterol, bad cholesterol. Eat healthy and you'll be healthy. Yet, for all the nutritional rhetoric, we are still a nation of junk food junkies. Our appetites betray us.

In Matthew 5:6 Jesus talks about another kind of hunger; an intense hunger that has to do with the real issues of life before God. And even in the spiritual realm the proverb still rings true: we are what we eat. To put it another way, we are what we hunger for. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

THERE'S HAPPINESS IN HUNGER

You've been running around the mall for several hours and you're getting hungry. You think, "Man, if I can just get something in my face and get my belly filled, I'll be one happy shopper." Happiness, at that moment, comes from getting rid of the hunger. Jesus, however, turns it all around. He says you're blessed (happy) when you get hungry! It's the starving who are happy, not the bloated! There is a profound happiness in having a desperate hunger and a burning thirst. But this happiness doesn't come from hungering and thirsting for just anything. The object of our hungering and thirsting is "righteousness." Jesus looked around and saw people hungering, but not for righteousness. They were hungering for praise, for power, for food, but not for righteousness.

What is righteousness? As Matthew uses the word he seems to mean a right relationship with God in which we seek to be conformed completely to His will. We hunger for a lot of things. People seek fulfillment of their "hunger" in all kinds of different venues: the world (which offers nothing but junk food), relationships, popularity, even religion (there's a big difference between religious rites and a genuine hunger for God).

Here's an interesting question. What does your appetite say about the health of your soul? What kinds of things do you hunger for? And after feeding on them, how do you feel?

A PROMISE: YOU SHALL BE FILLED

If we have that passionate desire to be right with God and stay that way, He is going to answer it to the full, and we will be happy. *Nothing else can truly satisfy us; anything else leaves us empty.* William Law wrote, "All that is in the world are only so many empty cups, and it does not matter which you take or how many you take, there is no quenching one's thirst out of empty cups." Mr. Law penned that observation nearly three hundred years ago, but it still rings remarkably, agelessly true. Human nature, and its appetites, remains unchanged.

Notice that biblical happiness is not something to be directly pursued; rather, it is the result of seeking something else (righteousness). It is a by-product of a relationship with God. A word of advice to those of you who are looking, searching for happiness. Stop it. Pursue a relationship with God instead and joy will find you.

TESTING OUR SPIRITUAL APPETITE

How do I know if I am hungering and thirsting after the right thing? How do I know if my appetite is healthy? Ask yourself the following questions and turn the searchlight of Scripture onto your heart.

(1) *Do I recognize my own emptiness? Do I have an awareness of my need for deliverance and a Savior?*

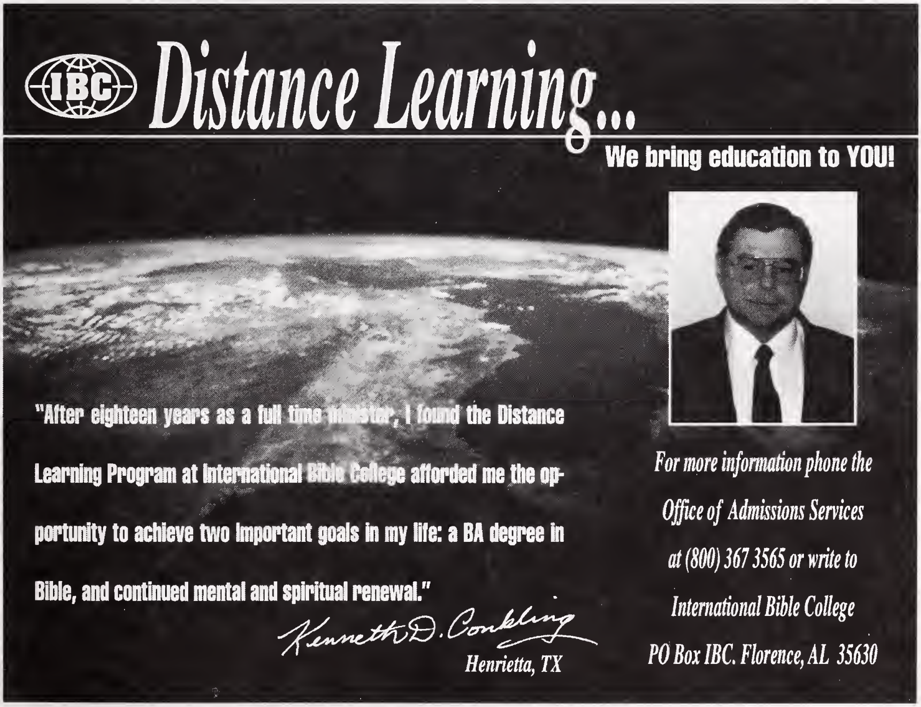
(2) *Do I avoid those things that are opposed to righteousness, or do I instead find myself too often and too easily indulging my fleshly lusts?*

(3) *Where is my focus?* Do I think about being Christlike?

(4) *How do I pray?* That is, what kind of things do I ask for? Money for bills? A better job? That people would notice what I do for the church? Or for a deeper and more intimate knowledge of God, among other spiritual concerns?

CONCLUSION

So, what is your soul feeding on today? Have you tried eating and drinking at other tables, only to come away still hungry and thirsty? Is there still a gnawing emptiness at the pit of your being? Then come sit down at Jesus' table. You'll never go hungry or thirsty again.



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Pondering Pentecost

Jerry Senn

An article in the April 13, 1998 issue of *Newsweek* reported on the growth of the Pentecostal movement in America. Included in the articles was this description of a typical worship service: "As the large congregation rises, the Spirit descends. Off come shoes: this is holy ground. Young and old, black and white, hop, twist and dance in aisles...Then song gives way to a string of 'oooh' and 'waaahs' and 'la–la–lahs.' As if on cue, the hoppers and twisters drop to their knees...Here and there someone begins to speak in tongues. 'Get used to it,' the music minister urges the crowd, 'This is what heaven will be like.' "

Is all this really a duplication of Pentecost? If you read Acts 2, you will find none of the manifestations claimed above. Even the tongues described above are not equivalent to the real languages spoken on Pentecost. People today incorrectly assume that because worshipers become excited, euphoric or ecstatic, the Holy Spirit has descended. However, the New Testament never pictures the Spirit's work in that way.

The purpose of His work on Pentecost was to point sinners to Jesus, upon whom they would "call" for salvation (Acts 2:21). The signs got their attention (v. 12) so that they would listen to Peter's message, then be moved to repentance and baptism for forgiveness (vv. 37-38).

All immersed believers receive the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32). He is the "seal" and "down payment" of a future inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). Being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:19) is to allow the Word of God to live in our minds and hearts to such an extent that He controls us. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is not a matter of losing control; rather, it is being controlled.

The Spirit has always used words, not emotion, to communicate the divine will to man. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 2:13, "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." Faith is trust, reliance, submission—an inner force involving mind, emotions and will. God gave us a capacity to trust and be "caught up" by the reality of things we cannot "see" with our eyes, "touch" with our fingers or "hear" with our ears.

However, all this is not to suggest that there is no place at all for emotion in our worship and in our relationship with God. Don't we "feel" God's presence, the peace which passes all understanding, the security of being in Christ? And, are there not moments in worship when we are moved by God's love to express our gratitude, or to praise Him in song? This is emotion without the extreme of emotionalism. Emotion is vital to a growing faith and a steadfast hope.

Let us thank God for His Spirit and allow Him free reign over our minds, emotions and will. Let us also find our greatest joy in obeying His words. A modern day Pentecost experience is when men welcome the gospel message, repent and are immersed and find forgiveness in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41).

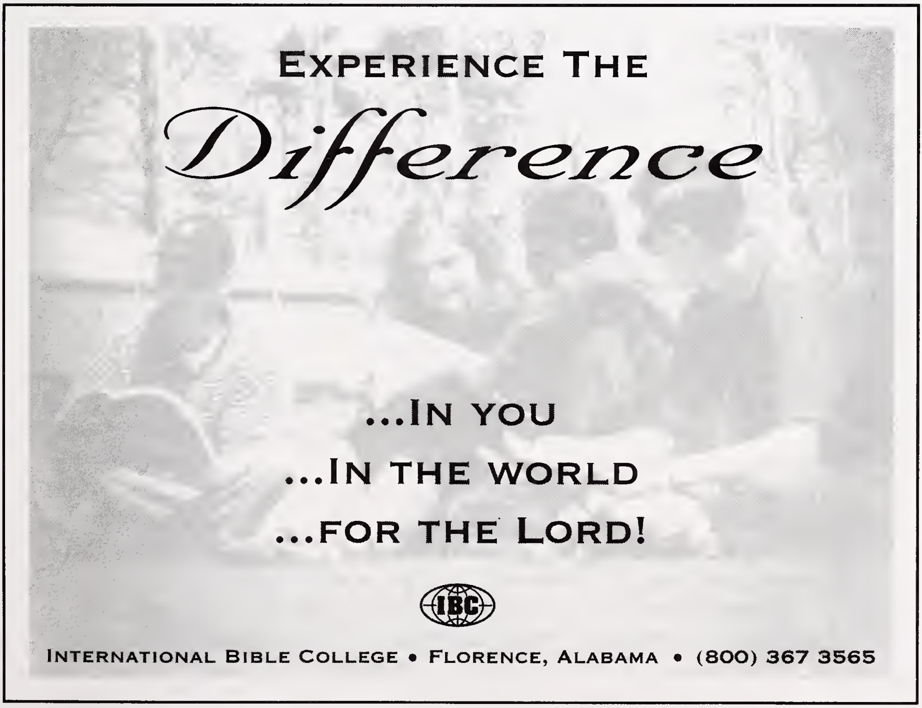
Jerry Senn preaches for the Hendersonville church. He can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791.

A Prayer For Self–Examination

Editor's Note: One of my hobbies is the collection of old books. Some years ago in a used book store I came across a volume of prayers and meditations published in 1740. The prayer below is from that book and is offered in the hope that it will strike a chord in your own heart. While the style may be dated, the sentiments are timeless and eloquently presented.

O Almighty God, thou searcher of hearts, who seest and knowest all my sins; help me so to search every secret of my heart, that I may leave no sin, if possible, unrepented of. Give me grace so impartially to judge and condemn myself, so humbly to repent and beg pardon, that I may not be condemned when I shall appear at thy tribunal, in the great and terrible day of the Lord Jesus!

But alas! after the most strict examination we can make, who can number his iniquities? Who can tell how oft he offendeth? Cleanse me therefore, O Lord, I beseech thee, not only from my presumptuous and known sins, but from all my secret and unknown transgressions, for his sake who died for sinners, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*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Youth Matters: A Column for the Youth:

Reason to Celebrate!

DANNY BOGGS

If you have given your life to God by being baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you have made the best choice you will ever make!

The book of Acts tells the stories of several people who made the same decision you made. After an Ethiopian man was baptized, he "came up out of the water…and went on his way *rejoicing*" (Acts 8:36-39). After a jailer and his family were baptized, "the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God" (Acts 16:33-34).

Why were they so happy? Because they had a new and special relationship with God. They knew that God had forgiven their sins, and now you know that He has forgiven yours.

No one is happier for you than God is! To God, you are like a sheep that wandered away from its shepherd. Getting you back safely was God's number one concern (read Luke 15:1-7). You are like money that a woman lost. Just as she searched until she finally found it, God has been searching for you (Luke 15:8-10). To God, you are like a child who ran away from home but decided to come back. He is your Father and He has been waiting for you to come home (Luke 15:11-332).

Your obedience to the gospel sparked a celebration in heaven itself. Lukes says that when the lost sheep and lost coin were found, there was rejoicing in heaven. And when the boy came back home, his father threw a huge party! Celebrate every day of your life with Christ!

**In the next few installments of this column we will explore more of what God does for a repentant believer who has been baptized into Christ.*

Danny Boggs, column editor, serves the Hendersonville church. If you would like to submit an article for consideration in this column, please send it to: 1975 Hendersonville Rd. 28791.

Brotherhood News

— MARK HUDSON

GREENSBORO, NC...
The *Friendly Ave. church* will be hosting the 20th Annual Caribbean Mission Forum on November 13-14, 1998. The forum will be attended by representatives from all over America and the Caribbean islands with a full agenda of reports from mission work taking place all around the islands. For more information contact the church office at (336) 292-7649. Friendly Ave. supports the ministry of *Paul Gilbert* in Jamaica.

RALEIGH, NC...
"The Most Excellent Way" is the theme for the 1998 North Carolina Evangelism Seminar. The seminar will be hosted by the Brook Avenue church of Christ in Raleigh on September 18-20. For more information call (919)821-2400 or visit www.brooks.org. *Lindsey Garmon* is the new Pulpit Evangelist for the Brook Avenue church in Raleigh. Lindsey and wife, Sherrie, have moved from Richmond, Virginia.

(continued on page 17)

The Victory

The crowd's voice raise,
It screamed and jeered
and shouted
"Crucify!"

He stood alone, head down,
hands bound; He had
resolved
to die.

The took His clothes,
Laid bare His back,
denied His
Deity.

The cruel whip tore
And slashed His flesh,
thorns mocked His
Royalty.

The soldiers struck, and
Laughed, and spit;
dishonor
now complete.

The battle's outcome
Seemed secure:
sin—victor,
Christ—defeated.

A rough hewn cross
Dragged through the streets
as up the hill
He trod.

Three nails…a cry
A groan, a thud.
"Behold, the
Son of God."

Gruff voices raised
A second time,
"Come down, then
we'll believe."

A huddled group,
Confused, in fear—
faith shattered,
left to grieve.

God's death shroud blocked
The sun's rays out.
His voice pleaded,
"Forgive."

"Eloi, Eloi…
My God, my God."
He died, so I
could live.

Earth shook, rocks split,
The curtain tore,
the graves gave up
their dead.

Now speared and battered,
Wrapped, entombed,
His body in
my stead.

A burst of light,
And empty tomb,
the war on sin
is won.

Satan himself,
Death, unbelief,
all conquered by
the Son!

Sharon Albright is a school teacher and can be contacted at 612 Lakeview Dr., Thomasville, NC 27360–6434.

This Gift is For You

TIM SENSING

Our relationship with God is described by Paul as a self–sacrifice given to Him as a worship service. Our gift of service is given to God in appreciation for His saving grace.

> *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— which is your mindful service. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will*
>
> *(Romans 12:1-2).*

God has given you a gift according to your faith for the purpose of serving in the body.

As each individual offers their life in service to God, the Christian community will functions as a unified body. Not only is the attitude transformed in how we view ourselves, but also in how we view others in that same body. The controlling, concrete admonition directed to the community's body life is, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought..."

> *"For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you:* ***Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought****, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully"*
>
> (Romans 12:3-8).

The seven different gifts in the community all function for the purpose of edification. These gifts are God given to each member of the community in proportion to each one's faith. Within the community, God's righteousness and mercy will find concrete expression. Gifts from God are blessings that enrich our lives. However, gifts from God remain blessings only when we in turn give them to others, all for His glory.

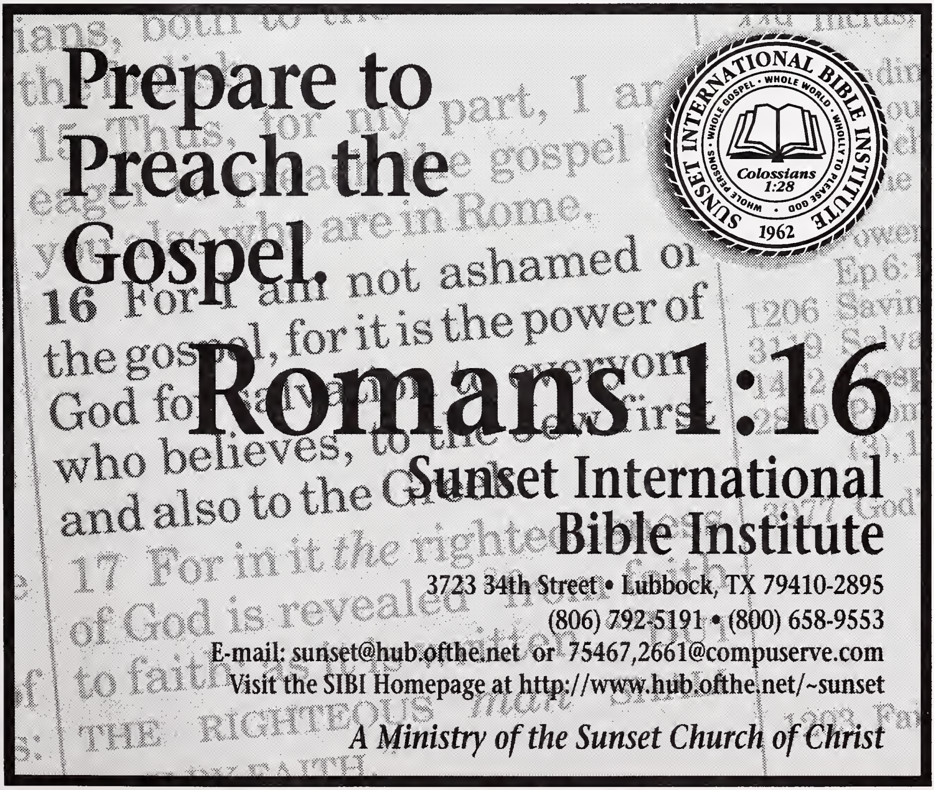
You have a role in the body of Christ. God has given you a gift according to your faith for the purpose of serving in the body. If your gift is contributing, do so with the admonitions of Romans 12:9-21 in mind. That is, contribute to others who are in need and do so with sincere love and devotion, honoring them above yourself. Offer your gift with zeal, joy, hope and patience. If your gift is encouraging, spur others on with spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Whether your gift is leadership, showing mercy, teaching, or one of the many others possibilities in the Lord, remember: your worship to God becomes real in your service to others. *Your gift given to another is a gift given to God.*

Tim Sensing has just completed a fruitful ministry with the Lexingtion church in Lexington, SC, and has accepted a new position with Abilene Christian University. We wish him well in his new ministry.

(continued from page 14)

KANNAPOLIS, NC... The Third Annual Ed. F. Hill Singing Workshop will be conducted August 28-29, 1998 at the Carolina Bible Camp & Retreat Center. The instructor will be *James Jackson* of Nashville, TN. The workshop is sponsored jointly by the Kannapolis Church of Christ and Carolina Bible Camp. For more information call the office of the Kannapolis church at (704) 786-3510.



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What's Right, Not Who's Right...

PAUL JARRETT

In the twelfth chapter of Luke we read of a man who came to Jesus with a complaint against his brother. He wanted Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. Jesus responded by rejecting the idea that he had been appointed as a judge or arbiter to determine who was at fault in this situation. Instead, Jesus challenged the man to examine his own heart to make sure he was not guilty of the sin of covetousness.

I mention this story because I believe it illustrates a misguided view of the role that God's word is to play in our lives. I am convinced that we are too inclined to read Scripture for the sake of determining *who's right.* What we ought to be doing is studying our Bible's to learn *what's right.*

Among the problems which Paul addressed in the church at Corinth was the fact that brethren were taking to each other to court to settle their differences. Paul's *first* advice was that if they felt compelled to have their disputes arbitrated, they should at least have it done by their fellow saints and not human courts (I Corinthians 6:1-6). His *best* advice (which we tend to overlook) went even further. He pointed out that if they were having to have disputes arbitrated, they had already lost out in respect to the spirit of their calling. Paul called on them to be willing to suffer wrong in keeping with that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. I Corinthians 6:7; Matthew 5:38-48). He went on to note that by failing to suffer wrong, they were actually guilty of doing wrong much like the man I mentioned earlier whom Jesus had confronted (I Corinthians 6:8; Luke 12:13-15).

> *I am convinced that we will always have conflict in our churches so long as we insist on using Scripture as a legal code to determine who's right in every dispute among brethren.*

I am convinced that we will always have conflict in our churches so long as we insist on using Scripture as a legal code to determine *who's right* in every dispute among brethren. Peace and harmony will only be achieved when each of us determines to study God's word to learn *what's right* in order that we might treat our brothers and sisters accordingly.

Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ and can be contacted at 1435 Mandarin Rd., Naples, FL 34102. His e-mail address is: pejarrett@juno.com.

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"... He had
compassion on
them, because they
were like sheep
without a
shepherd"

– Mark 6:34

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Editorial:

Loving the Despised

DENNIS CONNER

Brenda came to worship from across the street. Across the street was the rehab center at our local hospital. Everyone knew what that meant. Brenda was a recovering crack addict. And she was welcomed. Brenda was also African–American. To many people in my county that matters. "We'd love for you to stay for our fellowship meal," several people told her. It didn't matter to them. She stayed. And she came back the next Sunday. And the next. For several months Brenda was an important part of our fellowship in Yadkinville. What in the world was a person like that doing in a small church like ours in a small town like ours? She was there because she had experienced the love of Christ through some of His people; she was there because she had been loved like she had never been loved before.

> *"Jesus was a practitioner of grace, and so we must be."*

"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' Jesus answered them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' " (Luke 5:27-32).

What we have here is not only a call to discipleship; it is a redemption story. It is the climax of a string of redemption stories that began back in Luke 4:31-37 with the driving out of an evil spirit. Then followed the healing of Peter's mother–in–law and many others who were sick and demon–possessed (4:38-44), the cleansing of a man with leprosy (5:12-16), and the healing of a paralytic (5:17-26). Then comes the calling of Levi and the party at his house.

The story of Levi's calling affirms the redemptive nature of Jesus' mission. It also informs and instructs us about the nature of our own calling and mission today. Very simply, if we are truly to be the church we claim to be, then we must also be willing to minister to those Jesus ministered to and love the kinds of people Jesus loved. Jesus loved those that the "respectable religious folk" of His day loved to despise. In the calling of Levi we see Jesus doing what Jesus does best: loving the despised. His actions serve as a model for our ministry as the church today. Very simply, in all of our various forms of outreach, we must also be willing to love "sinners" (the despised, the marginalized, the untouchables), those whom polite religionists find hard to love.

Three principles come to light from this story.

First, we must be willing to meet people where they are. We know about the tax collectors of Jesus' day. They were viewed by their countrymen as traitors because they were in the employ of the infidel Romans. The Romans themselves tolerated the publicans as a necessary evil. Tax collectors typically thought nothing of gouging their own people so that they might line their pockets. They were greedy and crooked.

Did you notice when and where Jesus approached Levi? Jesus approached Levi while he was sitting there at his tax booth, practicing his trade of greed and graft! He approached Levi while he was still mired in his sinful practices. In the modern church we typically look at people like this and think, "Well, that one is probably a lost cause. To try to reach out to him/her would just be a waste of time." Now, if they show some evidence first of wanting to clean up their act, make themselves more respectable, then we might give them the time of day. Not Jesus. He went to people while they were in the grungiest depths of their sin and initiated the encounter. Jesus was a practitioner of grace, and so we must be!

We must have the eyes to see the despised in their sickness and the compassion to want to do something about it. And they are all around us. They are the addicts, the unethical business people, the crooked lawyers, the immoral, the migrants, the "gay", and many more. They are the kinds of people Jesus would notice.

Second, we must be willing to participate in table fellowship. We must be willing to show up at the party! The picture of Jesus at a dinner party in the full company of those unscrupulous tax collectors and assorted sinners is a picture of hope for those who experience the estrangement of sin. When criticized for this by the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus' response was, "I mix with sinners because they have a need and I have the cure." His motive, as someone else put it, was not to catch the disease, but to heal the patient.

When was the last time you sat down to eat with an "ungodly" sinner? Have you gotten involved with someone's life? Do you know their story? We today typically think it to be the better part of discretion not to associate with "those kinds of people." Rather than attempting to initiate an encounter, we walk to the other side of the road to avoid encounters. We tend to disdainfully reject invitations to their parties. And in the doing of these things we clearly align ourselves with the Pharisees and scribes.

Finally, expect to be criticized. In the eyes of the Pharisees, Jesus' behavior was completely unbecoming that of a supposed holy man. They questioned His judgment and character. They judged Him falsely. When you love sinners the way Jesus did, you can expect to be criticized as well; and sometimes the harshest criticism will come from within the church itself! However, what the Pharisees considered to be a discredit to Jesus, He considered to be His very purpose in life. Sometimes, the criticism of others only affirms the rightness of our ministry.

This story affirms "...how great a God we have! A God who cares about the despised. A God who can touch the hardest heart with forgiveness and transform the most warped personality—that the sinner might become a new man" (*You Can Be Transformed*, Larry Richards, Victor Books, 1974, p. 42). As the church we are called to a ministry that affirms the greatness and power of God's love, a ministry that truly loves sinners. They are sick, and we have the cure.

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Associate Editorial:

What Could You Do?

Jim Mullican

We are told in 2 Tim. 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Scripture calls us to do our best in serving God, but it is obvious that many of us don't.

Many are haphazard in attendance at worship. Some of us give far less than we could and should. We allow opportunities to tell friends about Jesus to go by unredeemed. We fail to develop our abilities to teach, preach, lead singing, and pray. And if we ever feel guilty, we console ourselves by saying, "I can't. That's beyond my ability."

I recently read an interesting note about elephants—those mighty beasts able to pick up huge logs with their trunks. The average elephant weighs 11,000 pounds, yet for some 4,000 years men have used them and trained them to work. How does a 100 pound man in India retrain an elephant that weighs 100 times more than he does?

The answer is that when the elephant is very small, he is chained to a wooden stake driven into the ground. Pull as he will, the elephant cannot break it or pull it up. Eventually he accepts that he cannot escape, and stops trying. When he grows to his full size, he could easily break free of his restraints, but he never tries. This powerful and intelligent animal is held back, not by the flimsy restraint, but by his own thoughts.

How often is that true of us? As long as we think we can't do something, we can't. Most of us are more lacking in will than in ability. Are you doing your best in service to God, or are you letting yourself be held back by your own thoughts?

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Mullican Moves to Texas

Jim Mullican, *Carolina Christian* Associate Editor since 1992 and preacher for the Central Haywood Church of Christ since 1985, has accepted a new work with the church in Channelview, Texas. Jim and his wife, Judy, were to move from Clyde, NC, to Texas on September 15.

Brother Mullican has been a valued member of both the *Carolina Christian* staff and the board of directors. He is balanced, fair, steadfast, and a lover of truth. The Central Haywood church has benefitted from his 13 year ministry there, doubling in size during that time. All of us here at *Carolina Christian* wish you the best, Jim, and will be praying that God will richly bless your ministry in Channelview. Our loss is certainly their gain.

What Love Does

JIM GARDNER

Editor's Note: The following article was originally an evening devotional delivered to senior campers at Carolina Bible Camp in 1982. It was recorded by Geoffrey Sikes, who subsequently had it transcribed. Although originally intended for teenagers, the sentiment and principles expressed in the message speak powerfully to all of us. In 1982 Jim was preaching for the Brewer Rd. Church of Christ in Winston-Salem, NC. He now resides in Richmond, VA.

Paul told the Corinthians that "love does not keep count of wrong. It does not rejoice in evil, but rejoices with the truth...it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things," and that it "never fails." I've heard you and seen you show praise and affection for people that you admire and love, and I'm proud of you for that. And I want to beg of you tonight—plead with you—that you make that a part of your life; that you see the duty of love that you owe to other people. Not to keep books on them, not to wait until they're worthy of your love, not to rejoice when they fail—but to rejoice and praise them when they achieve something, to purpose to love them always, to believe in them always, to hope the best for them no matter what they do.

A Christian shouldn't go through life on the defensive. He shouldn't be paranoid. He shouldn't be ready for the other person to disappoint him. People will disappoint you. They will. But if so, then that's the price love pays.

And don't wait for other people to be worthy of love, because love isn't something anybody can ever be worthy of. It isn't a reward to be given for being good. It's a gift to be nobly and freely given, and cherished humbly and thankfully. You can't ever learn to love somebody unless you're willing to look at all that's good in them and praise it and cherish it, and patiently, compassionately, lovingly help them to conquer the bad.

The hardest relationship in your life right now may be with your parents. It certainly may be over the next few years. Purpose in yourself to have this attitude of love about your parents. It's regarded sometimes as though it's natural for teenagers to be mean to their parents—to despise them, to fail to appreciate them; but that it's okay because in a few years you can re–establish friendship with them.

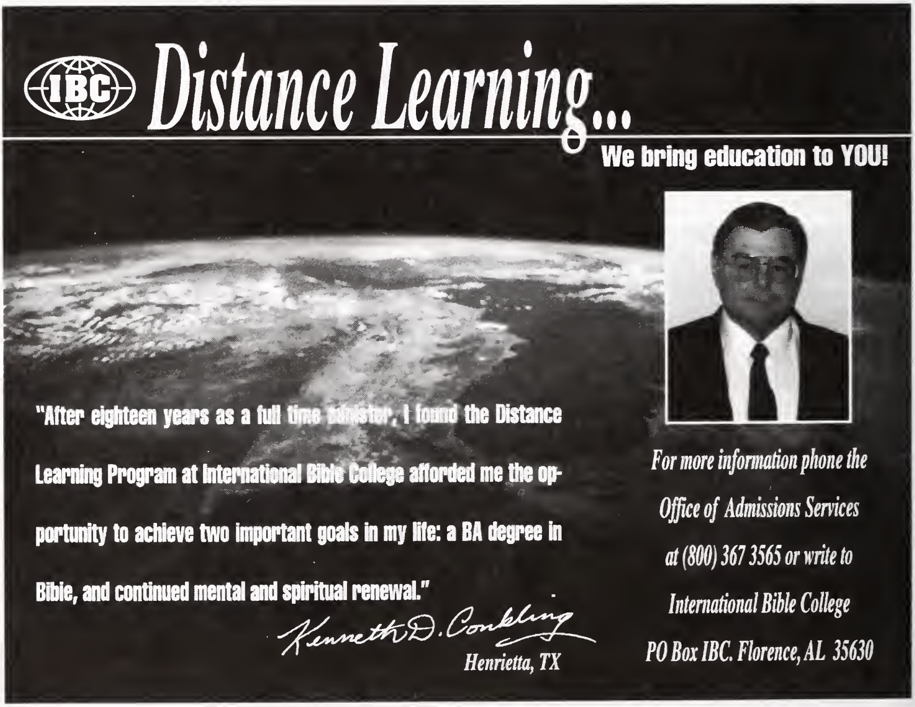
When I was fourteen, I remember my father on my birthday giving me a dollar, and I didn't complain. I didn't dare. But I let him know how cheap I thought he was. I was...well, I can pout better than you can, probably, and I pouted to him. And that afternoon, he died. And I have wanted all my life, and will want all my life, one more moment to tell him how much I loved him, how great he was, how much I owe him.

You don't have forever to love your parents. Don't keep track of all the times that they fail you, although they will fail you, because you fail them even more. They almost certainly love you more than you love them, and you have pierced their heart every time you have treated them unkindly. Don't rejoice when they fail to be who they say they try to be, because what you see as hypocrisy may actually be heroic struggle. Don't appoint yourself a judge before you become a man or a woman. Purpose to love them for who they are no matter what, to believe in them and cherish them, to hope for them, to have them be your home as long as you're alive.

Have that same attitude about the church. There's a disease that's present sometimes in the church—the disease of judgment, of constant criticism, of envy and pride. It's a disease that comes from Satan, not from God. You will discover, if you haven't discovered already, that the church is full of sinners, that it's full of hypocrites, that it's full of people who fail. But the church is also full of people who carry the torch of faith to you.

You're sitting here, and all that you have, all that's good about you, you owe not only to God, but to the people who have been the tools of God in leading you to Him. You may think of yourself as just dandy—bright and smart and better than other people—and there are times that I look at my life, and I see the good that's in me as well as the bad. But I know that whatever I am I owe to the faith of ignorant men who knew nothing but the Bible and who were unsophisticated in everything but the art of self–sacrifice.

Praise the church. Don't keep track of it's failings. Learn to note and praise and cherish all that's good. Don't rejoice when the church fails, but rejoice with people, wherever they may be, who are doing good. Purpose to love the church with all your heart. Christ gave His heart for it. Believe in it. Hope for it that it may be what God intended, and keep that love no matter what happens.



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The Corners of Our Fields

PAUL JARRETT

The prophet Haggai described conditions in the Israel of his day in a way that very much parallels those that exist in our own day when he wrote, "You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes" (Haggai 1:6).

One of the major indictments that can be made against us as a people comes in the fact that even though we are the wealthiest nation on earth, we have also become a debtor nation. This is true whether we are speaking of us as a nation as a whole, or as individual citizens. Like those described by Haggai, we never seem to have enough. Our wages are put into a purse with holes!

Haggai's challenge to the people of his day was to "consider your ways." They had lost sight of what needed to be given priority in their lives. Like them, we as well need to give thoughtful and prayerful attention to setting our priorities in order.

In the course of examining our ways, we would do well to give attention to how we have neglected the needs of others in the course of striving to satisfy or own desires. This is seen in the fact that we spend every penny on ourselves, leaving nothing for those less fortunate.

In Leviticus 19:9-10 we find some instructions God gave Israel of old that we as the new Israel would do well to heed: "Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field…You shall leave them for the needy and the stranger…"

The challenge for Christians and for the church collectively is to see beyond our own comfort to the discomfort of others; to look beyond our fullness to the emptiness in other peoples' lives. There are many ways this can be done. At one congregation I worked with several years ago our families were challenged to give the loose change they had at the end of each day to meet the needs of those less fortunate, rather than spending every penny on themselves. It matters little how we do it; it's just that it's important that do it!

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Perfect Gifts

DANNY BOGGS

When you want to show someone how special they are, you search for the perfect gift! When you were baptized into Christ, God wanted to show you how special you are, so He showered you with some awesome gifts that were just right for you. God gives "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17).

First, He gave you a brand new life. Have you ever heard someone say, "I wish I had never been born!"? Sometimes things just get so bad that people wish they weren't even alive, or at least that they could start all over. Good news! God makes us able to be born again (John 3:3-5). The day you were baptized is really your spiritual birthday. God has erased the guilt of everything you've messed up in the past, and He has given you new and everlasting life.

Put another way, God has raised you from death and given you a new life. "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3-5). You are not the same old you anymore. You are new and improved (2 Corinthians 5:17)!

Second, God has saved you from condemnation. Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will not be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Do you know what it means to be condemned? When a building is condemned, it is no longer safe, and it is good for nothing but to be demolished. Sin is so bad that everyone who sins deserves to be destroyed in hell forever. But because you are in Christ Jesus, God has saved you from destruction!

Third, God has given you a good conscience, and you know you needed one! "Baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the body, but the appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Your conscience rejoices when you do something good and burns when you do some-thing bad. In being baptized you asked God to forgive you of all the bad things you've done in the past. Now you can live with a good conscience because you know God has forgiven those sins. You don't have to keep feeling guilty about them.

Fourth, God has made you a member of His church. Many people think of the church as a building, but God's church is not made of wood, bricks and glass. In reality the church is a big family. God's church is made up of people whom God has saved (Acts 2:38-41). This family has the honor and responsibility of functioning as the body of Christ on earth (Ephesians 1:22-23). When you were baptized into Christ, you were initiated into His body, the church (1Corinthians 12:12-13). You are a useful part of Christ's body, the church, just as all your actual body parts are useful to you.

God has made you a saint. The word "saints" is not just the name of a football team, nor are saints dead good people who were more special than others. The truth is, every Christian is a saint. The book of Philippians was written "to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi" (Philippians 1:1). To be a saint simply means to be holy; to be set apart by God for His own purposes. You became a saint when you became a

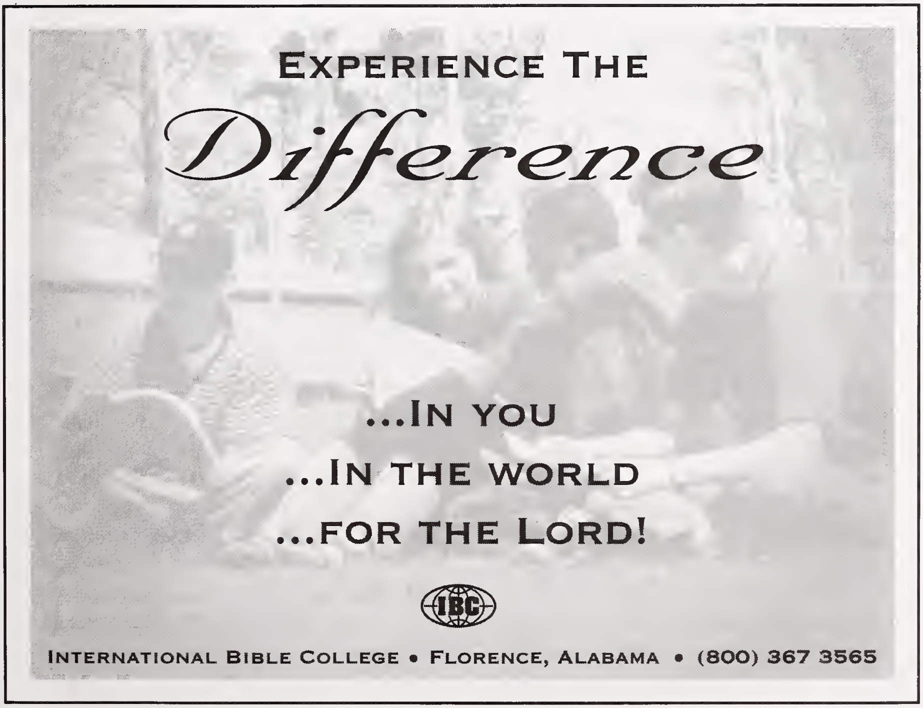
Christian!

God has made you a citizen of heaven. The Bible says, "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). You are not only a citizen of the United States, or the states of North Carolina or South Carolina. You are also a citizen of heaven. And when life in the United States and the whole earth is over, you will take up residence forever in the place Jesus has reserved for you (John 14:1-3).

Finally, God has given you the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not only do you have a place in heaven, but the Holy Spirit has a place in you! We are told in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When you repented and were baptized, God made your body into a temple where the Holy Spirit can live (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

So, if you think you're special just because you're a Christian, then you're right! God loved you enough to send the perfect gift, His Son Jesus, to save you from your sins. Isn't it great to have a Father who gives us perfect gifts?

This is the second of a four–part series. Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791, or by e-mail at dannyboggs@juno.com.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Dedicated to Telling the Story

Peter Rode

history is replete with examples of people who were dedicated to the task of taking the word of God to people who needed to hear it. Jeremiah wrote, "Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:8-9).

A casual reading of Hebrews 11:32-40 presents a picture of what men and women experienced because of their dedication to God. All the apostles, with the exception of John, are traditionally reputed to have died as martyrs for the cause of Christ. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). And yet, when we read about these characters in Scripture, we find it difficult to identify with them. We somehow think they were specially empowered and strengthened by God to withstand the trials and tribulations that came their way. But they were just like us. God hasn't changed and He is still able, as He was then, to empower and strengthen us in the midst of adversity. The only difference might be *our* dedication (or lack of it).

One great example of an extra–biblical character with tremendous dedication for his calling was Francis Asbury. Asbury was from England and he became one of the foremost circuit riders (a preacher who traveled on horseback to preach on the frontier) in early American history. After arriving in America and noticing that most preachers settled in the cities, Asbury wrote, "My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I will show them the way." He went on to gain a great reputation as "the prophet of the Long Road." He never married, never owned a home, and never rented a room. Asbury rode more than 275,000 miles on horseback, preaching an average of a sermon a day for more than 50 years. He saw the fellowship he preached for grow from 6 preachers and 700 members to 700 preachers and 250,000 members. His motto was: "Live or die, I must ride." Asbury lived up to that motto until the time of his death in the cabin home of George Arnold on March 31, 1816, in Spottsylvania, Virginia. While we might question some of his theology, we cannot question his dedication.

As Christians, our calling is to be dedicated to the task of being the salt of the earth and a light to the world. In our busy and cluttered world we need to take the words of Thomas A'Kempis to heart,

"Blessed indeed are those ears which listen not for the voice sounding without, but for the truth teaching inwardly. Blessed are the eyes that are shut to outward things, but intent on things inward. Blessed are they who are glad to have time to spare for God, and who shake off all worldly hindrances. Consider these things, O my soul, and hear what the Lord your God speaks."

I pray that we might have the desire and the dedication to be like the early church in Jerusalem who, when scattered because of persecution, "preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). May we always "live a life worthy of the calling" we have received (Ephesians 4:1).

Peter Rode ministers to the Friendly Ave. church, 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

What Would You Like to Tell Your Preacher?

Editor's Note: In a Bible class at Carolina Bible Camp in 1996, Vernon Dugger of Sylva, NC, asked his students, "What are some things that you would like to say to your preacher?" The responses were varied, interesting, insightful, and even a little convicting! Preachers, take note!

1. Change the way you dress.
2. Relax. Be a real person.
3. Thank you.
4. Lose some weight.
5. Don't repeat yourself so much.
6. I like the way you explain things.
7. Don't put yourself to sleep!
8. I don't get it.
9. Rogaine.
10. You don't have to do everything.
11. Why do you spend so much time preaching?
12. You're not as funny as you think!
13. I like him.
14. I like you in person. I wish you could be more like that in the pulpit.
15. Chill.

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Perseverance

John Forsythe

With unwavering confidence, Muhammed Ali proclaimed, "I am the greatest!" And indeed, he was the greatest boxer of his time (and maybe of all time). His skill was beyond comparison; the speed of his hands and the grace of his movements were the envy of the boxing world. His showmanship, inside and outside the ring, coupled with his caustic poetry and continued success, gave him the unquestioned authority, in the minds of many, to raise his arm in that familiar pose and declare, "I am No. 1!"

> *"But my God shall supply all you need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ" (Philippians 4:19).*

"I want to be like Mike" is the theme of a popular TV commercial and is the cry of thousands of basketball players, young and old. Michael Jordan plays basketball with such ability and competitive spirit that a whole new vocabulary of superlatives has arisen, beginning with "Air Jordan." A whole generation of kids emulate his shooting style, with tongue hanging loose and legs askew. But only Jordan can perform with that unparalleled consistency for an entire season. His dominance of the NBA in offensive and defensive statistics, and championship rings, gives him all he needs to be able to say without question, "I'm No. 1!"

"March Madness" is that time of year when 64 of the best college basketball teams compete in the annual rite of determining the national champion. The underlying goal of March Madness is for one team to be able to claim at the end of the tournament, "We're No 1!"

Muhammed Ali and Michael Jordan did not reach the pinnacle of their respective fields without paying a price. Hours upon hours in the gym, countless punches on the punching bag, miles and miles of roadwork, and scores of preliminary bouts as both an amateur and a professional were necessary before Ali could proclaim, "I am the greatest!" Jordan spent his youth practicing basketball on a court at his Wilmington, NC home, honing his precious skills and instincts. Under the watchful eye of his coaches in elementary, high school and college, he continued to perfect those skills into an art. As a pro, he is the first to arrive for practice and the last to leave. After thousands upon thousands of practice shots, years of sweat and sore muscles, success and failure, he can proclaim with certainty, "I'm No. 1!"

And when the hoopla is over and

the losers have made all their excuses, the NCAA Champion will be the team that was most willing to pay the price. The champion will be the team that refused to quit. Then there will be no argument as they shout for all to hear, "We're No. 1!"

"OK," you ask, "What does all of that have to do with me?" Well, Christian, do you know that you can proclaim with the same gusto, "I am No. 1?" Do you know that the price has already been paid for you to be able to speak with such boldness? And do you know that Scripture affirms over and over again your personal significance? Listen to the Book of Life: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27-28); "To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father..." (Revelation 1:5-6); "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength... They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:29); "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9); and this, "But my God shall supply all you need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ" (Philippians 4:19).

Muhammed Ali's skills diminished over time; his once beautiful and perfectly toned body faded and became weak and soft, the victim of time and fatigue. His once razor sharp mind became fuzzy and unclear from thousands of blows and the ravages of disease. Since the time of his prime, many champions have come and gone. Michael Jordan's step will slow and he will no longer be able to soar like a man–bird. In time another will become the hero and idol of the nation. And next year, the NCAA will crown a new champion and this year's winner will be like yesterday's newspaper—old news.

But what about you? Will you still be No. 1? Again, listen to the word of God: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22); "For we were made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (Hebrews 3:14); "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9); "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

We're No. 1! We're No. 1! We're No. 1! Thank God for puttin us on top and keeping us there.

John Forsythe serves as an elder for the Westside church in Rocky Mount, NC. He can be contacted at 109 Bayridge Court, Rocky Mount, NC 27803.

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More Letters to Jesus

NATASHA KUDRYA

Dear Jesus,

I love you now, but there was a time when I thought World was the one with whom I thought I would spend the rest of my life. I still remember the empty promises and lies once whispered into my ears.

> NO MORE "PLEASURES" OF LIFE? NO UNDERSTANDING OF MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS? CHANGE MY WHOLE LIFE? DIE FOR MY OLD SELF THAT I HAVE BEEN CHERISHING FOR SO LONG?

"Live only for yourself, take all you can in this life, no matter how and at what expense; get rich, famous, trust only in yourself— and I will love you! I love successful and strong. You are worthy to have everything you want in me. Get rooted in me, be selfish, become complacent and we will be happy together forever!"

"I do not like the poor in spirit," he says. " I'm for those who are rich in themselves, self–centered and conceited. Stay with me, if you want to be full of yourself and get everything on this earth."

But you, Jesus, quietly contradict his worldly wisdom: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Again I hear from the World: "I'm not the one who mourns—this life is too short to be sad or even think about grief, so let's eat, drink and be merry. Be satisfied and happy with me today, get the best of it right now!"

But you say, instilling hope: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"I hate the meek," he goes on despisingly. "I am for those who are strong in themselves, full of fleshly pride and self–sufficiency. Grow in me, and you will reach the peak of my glory."

And you tell me by your own example, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Intricately weaving his web of deception, he assured me, "Come to me and you will never hunger or thirst for righteousness, for I will give you *my* satisfaction, which lasts but for a moment, and *my* way of being right in my own eyes—whatever is right for *me*, whatever pleases *me*, is *my* righteousness, and I do not need anything else."

As opposed to his cunning, your words sound out firmly, promising, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Agressively he gave me his advice, "If you are striving for happiness with me, there should be no mercy in you for others; seek your own, for no one will do that for you. There's no room for longsuffering and kindness toward others in me. Life is tough and 'merciful' is not my description."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," you say, having become mercy yourself.

"You cannot live with me and have purity in your heart," he would say, getting more blunt with me, "for my gods do not need that! Purity causes vulnerability, open nerves and tender heart, and this is something which is not going to give you satisfaction or joy, when surrounded by me and my gods of greed, self–interest and fleshly lusts."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," you assure me, and there's nothing that can bring more peace and strength.

"I do not care for peace, for I am always ready to fight to get what I want, or cause somebody to fight—with others, with themselves, with the One who created them (and me). It is so boring to be good and peaceful!" he grinned with unkind fire in his eyes.

Your answer to his spirit of war is simple: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

And finally he haughtily claimed, "There is no God. This life is meant for pleasures. It's not pleasant at all when you are being persecuted, despised or rejected for His name. Stay with me, and there will be no persecutions for you; live by my rules and you will be loved, accepted and appreciated. I do not like those who differ from others. Become like others in me, and you will be well–off till you die. And then, who cares anyway?!"

I was about to be persuaded, for I was (and am) afraid of rejection and pain. I wanted to be loved and understood, and it seemed that I had found that in World. But then I heard your tender, yet firm voice, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kind of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..."

Great is my reward in heaven. Yes, but I want to live happily today, now! Loose popularity in the World? No more "pleasures" of life? No understanding of my family and friends? Change my whole life? Die for my old self that I have been cherishing for so long? Quit living for myself and start living for others? How can I rejoice and be glad in it? And my reward will be only in heaven?

At that time I did not have enough faith, I was confused and scared, but I had had enough of myself, and inwardly, instinctively I felt this eternal urge to be closer to the One who is everlastingly loving, forgiving and merciful. I closed my eyes, stepped down to the grave of baptism, and...I was almost blinded by the shine of your glory; felt so happy and new inside.

Complete surrender, together forever, "for better or for worse" (mine is worse, and yours is better).

I am yours forever.

Natasha Kudrya lives in Donetsk, Ukraine. She divides her time working with congregations in the cities of Donetsk and Odessa and is a professional interpreter.

Brotherhood News

— MARK HUDSON

Aiken, SC... The *Aiken Church of Christ* will be hosting a Marriage Building Workshop with Dr. Russ Jurek September 25-26. The schedule will be Friday night, 7:00-9:00; Saturday, 9:00 am-Noon. For more information call (803) 649-2700.

Old and New

Ron Newberry

We frequently assume, simply because we have never considered the alternative, that the way things are is the way they've always been. For example, our children cannot imagine a time when television didn't exist. There has never been a time in their lives in which it did not exist.

> "Everything should be judged on its own merits and its bibilcal soundness."

Our children also expect our experiences to be similar to their own. Our younger daughter, Monica, asked me several years ago where I went to nursery school. I told her that I didn't go to nursery school. She then asked about preschool. I had to explain that I didn't go to preschool, either. Up the ladder of education she went. She wanted to know about kindergarten. Sorry! No kindergarten. Finally, in exasperation she asked, "Daddy, did you ever go to school?"

Things have not always been the way they are today. Take Sunday schools, for example We aren't sure where, but we seem fairly confident that we could turn to some ancient first century text and find a Sunday school program of some kind. I'm afraid that's not possible.

Sunday schools originated in 1780 when a businessman named Robert Raikes saw dirty little kids involved in their favorite past–time: fist fights. Raikes established a Sunday school program to keep these children off the streets and out of trouble. He gave pennies to those who came and paid the teachers twenty–five cents per Sunday. The payment was eventually eliminated and the idea took flight.

Unfortunately, this new and radical idea didn't receive a warm reception everywhere. The Boston Park Street Church recorded in 1817 that a number of their members met to discuss forming a Sunday school. The preacher, a Dr. Griffin, was present. Objections to the idea included: it might desecrate the Sabbath; children should be instructed at home by their parents; and professing Christians ought to be at home engaging in reading and meditation instead of out teaching other people's children.

Isn't it interesting that something we take for granted—indeed, something we would resolutely argue to maintain—has neither a Scriptural mandate (although biblically permissible) nor a history of ready acceptance. We do tend to believe that the way we are is the way we have always been.

No one would argue that every new or novel idea is a good one and ought to be immediately accepted simply because it's modern any more than anyone would argue that every fresh or unique concept should be automatically rejected because it's unconventional. Everything should be judged on its own merit and on its biblical soundness. New isn't bad (or good) just because it's new; old isn't good (or bad) just because it's old. All ideas, concepts, programs and methods, new or old, are good or bad based on whether they are substantiated by the word of God. That should always be our primary and most significant test.

Ron Newberry can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 274210.

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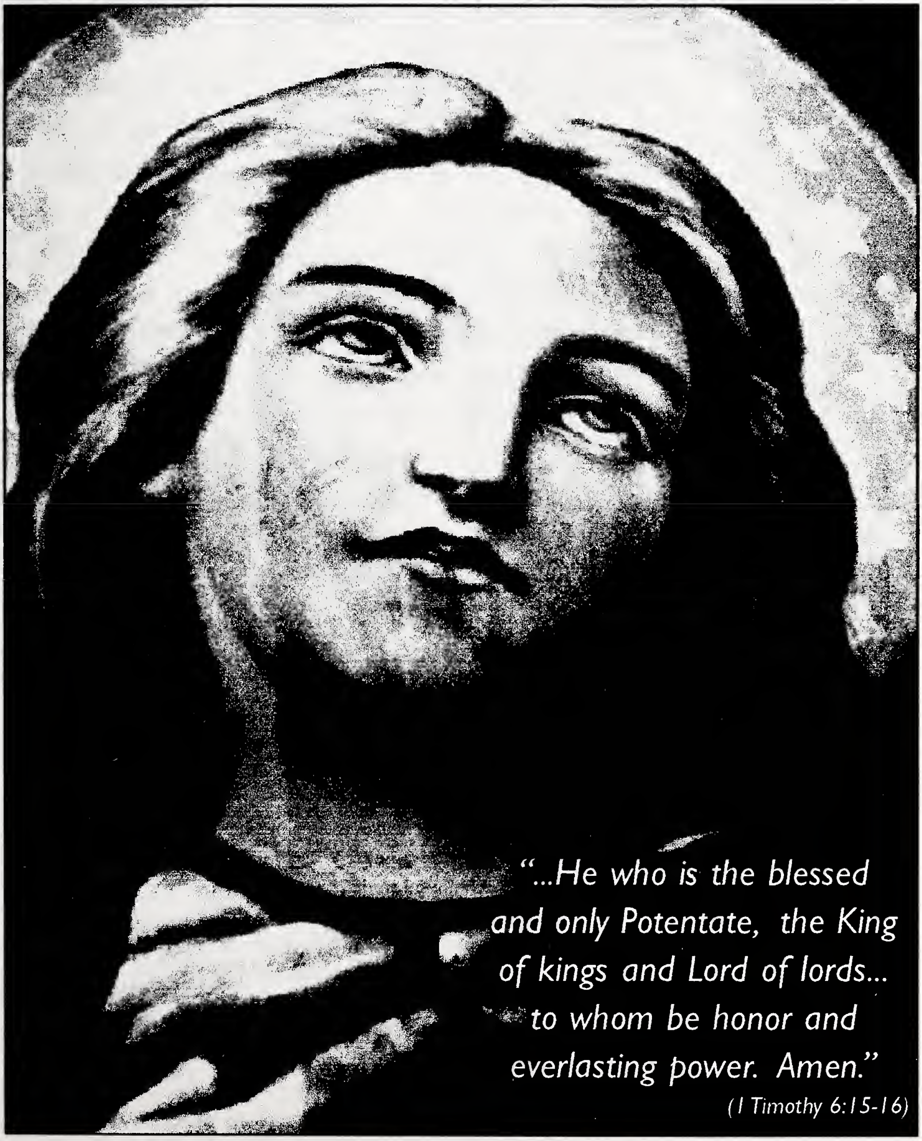

"...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords... to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen."

(I Timothy 6:15-16)

CAROLINA christian

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Glorying in the Cross

Dennis Conner

One may assess with more than a fair degree of accuracy the true measure of a man's character by taking note of what he values most in life. Does he glory in his material wealth? Then people can easily become secondary and the pursuit of more becomes primary. He tends to judge the worth and value of others by the standard of "how much." Does he glory in social status? Then likely he is self–centered and prideful. Does he glory in his intellect? Then he is quite possibly arrogant and impatient with those of lesser ability. The same principle holds true in the realm of religion as well. Does one glory in his own achievement and performance? Then he will tend to feel little or no dependency upon Christ.

In Galatians Paul responds to the false gospel of the Judaizing teachers. They taught that in order to be saved, a person had to supplement the work of Christ on the cross with a work of his own (in this case, circumcision). Thus, the cross was not enough. They apparently believed and taught that there was something meritorious in their work. Because they gloried in their own performance and achievements, the Judaizers, though claiming to be Christian, were in reality little more than "Christianized" Pharisees. Paul, however, utterly rejected any type of self–glorying and responded to those who boasted in their fleshly performance by writing, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

D. Martyn Lloyd–Jones has observed that there is no more subtle test to the genuineness of our Christian profession than "our attitude to the cross." What does our attitude toward the cross of Christ reveal about our faith? Is the cross the thing above everything else of which we boast? What, indeed, does it mean to boast, or glory, in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?

> What does our attitude toward the cross of Christ reveal about our faith?"

First, it means that *the cross becomes the standard by which everything else is measured.* When we say that we "glory" in a thing, or boast of it, we are also saying something about or estimation of everything else in comparison. When Paul says he glories in the cross, he automatically reveals the worth he places on everything else that is not involved with the cross. The flesh and all of its glories are brought to the cross, weighed in the balance, and found to be woefully lacking. One cannot boast of the greatness of his sacrifices, the superiority of his spiritual heritage, the correctness of his thinking, the vastness of his understanding, or the worth of his own righteousness when compared to the sin of others. The cross is the only acceptable grounds of boasting. As Paul wrote to the Philippian brethren, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish…" (Philippians 3:7-8).

Second, *the cross defines our relationship to the world.* As Paul understood it, his relationship to the cross necessarily involved a new relationship with the world (the "world" referring to anything other than the cross in which a person might glory). And what of his relationship to the world? Very simply, it was dead to him and he to it. For him, the enslaving power of the world had been broken by the surpassing power of the cross. He was done with the world; it no longer held any attraction for him. It was nothing more than costume jewelry. The cross was the real jewel. By the power of the cross of Jesus Paul had been set free, delivered, and empowered for real life and righteousness.

So, what is your attitude toward the cross? You say that it is important to you? Fine, but that is not enough. Do you *glory* in it? Does the cross fascinate you, possess you, leave you awestruck? And when you boast, is it of what you have done for God, or of what God has done for you in the cross of Jesus Christ? Just what is your attitude toward the cross?

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Expectant Praying

Ron Newberry

Let me ask you a rather personal question. When you pray, do you really expect God to answer your requests? Do you really anticipate a positive response while willing to live with a negative one? Do you really believe that prayer changes things?

Okay, so I cheated. That was actually three questions. But they are all really the same question, aren't they? (I know. That's number four. So, stop counting already.) Is prayer a last resort for you or is it the first tool you use to make things happen for the cause of Christ?

> "But before we giggle at their puny faith, let's take a look at ourselves."

Earlier this past summer we were made painfully aware of the terrible fires in Florida. Out of the 67 counties in Florida, only one did not sustain significant damage from the fires. Christians all over the country were praying about the conditions and asked God for rain. At the time, how much faith did we have that God would actually soak the state of Florida with needed rain?

I recall hearing about similar drought conditions many years ago in a rural part of the South. Crops were dying and livestock were suffering terribly. Many of the people finally called a meeting at the local church to pray for rain. When they all gathered the preacher said, "Before we pray, I want to ask you just one question. Where are your umbrellas?"

We may snicker at such an obvious blunder on their part. We may chuckle at their obvious lack of faith. But before we giggle at their puny faith, let's take a look at ourselves. If we prayed for rain, would we bring our umbrellas?

Do we really expect God to answer our prayers?

Ron Newberry serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC.

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Songs in the Night

Howard Winters

Editor's Note: The following article originally appeared in the October, 1986 issue of ***Carolina Christian****. Howard Winters served as editor of* ***Carolina Christian*** *for 17 years.*

Singing the songs of Zion is an inspiration to the saints of God. But the source of the inspiration goes deeper, much deeper, than the singing itself. Singing, true spiritual singing, is a result of what is in the heart. This means that the inspiration of singing is indicative of the joy and hope that permeate the life.

It is a joy to sing when singing is an expression of joy. Or as James says, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). This, it is easy to sing when all is going well, when we are happy and blessed and are bubbling over with joy because life has delivered to us many good things...and few bad ones. But the real test of Christianity comes when the night of affliction or persecution comes upon us. It is then we must sing, if we sing at all, songs in the night (cf. Job 35:10; Psalm 77:6). Songs in the night are more than an expression of joy: they are sources of comfort and means of encouragement. They show that we believe that the power of God, working in us, will enable us to withstand any device of Satan which he has designed for our destruction. We can overcome as long as we can sing.

As an example of songs in the night, consider Paul and Silas as they lay beaten and bleeding in the inner prison at Philippi. Their only crime was to cast an evil spirit out of a slave girl who brought her masters much gain because she was possessed. To save the girl was to spoil the source of their fortune. But save her Paul and Silas did. And for this act of gracious kindness they were beaten with many stripes and cast into prison. The jailor was charged to keep them with all safety. He thus thrust them into an inner prison and fastened their feet securely in stocks. Here, then, are two innocent men, unjustly beaten, wrongly cast into prison, unnecessarily secured as the worst of criminals, lying in a cold, filthy, dark dungeon with their beaten bodies bruised and bleeding. If ever there was a time or place or a people or a circumstance to complain, this was it. But with Paul and Silas the very opposite was true.

> ■
>
> "In the shadow of the cross, Jesus sang!"
>
> ■

The Bible says, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praise unto God; and the prisoners heard them" (Acts 16:25). How amazing! But read the remainder of the story (Acts 16:26-40) and see how that by their songs in the night they were able to lead the jailor and his household to the saving truth of Christ the Lord; how their song in suffering resulted in the salvation of others from eternal suffering. It was not pleasant to have been beaten almost to death and then cast into a dark dungeon and bound as dangerous criminals, but the strength of Paul and Silas came from their internal convictions that God was still in control. They could thus sing, and their song in the night has echoed down through the centuries to remind us that no night is so dark and no prison so filthy but that the saints of God can lift their voices in song—lift their voices in song to praise their Redeemer for delivering them from a greater evil than all the afflictions this life can ever know; namely, sin and the horrible death it brings.

Our blessed Lord also knew what it meant to sing songs in the night. In the darkest hours of His life, knowing that His time had come and that in a few short hours He would be suffering the terrible agony of the cross, Jesus spent some time privately with His disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper, the divine memorial of His death. And then, as the inspired record says, "When they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30). In the shadow of the cross, Jesus sang! This should encourage us to lift our voices in song, regardless of how dark, how dreary, or how depressing the events of life may become.

When there are no songs in the night, defeat is all but certain; when there are songs in the night, victory is all but sure.

Prepare to Preach Christ.

I Corinthians 15:3-4

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I Asked God

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I asked God for strength,
that I might achieve;
I was made weak, that I
might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might
do greater things;
I was given infirmity, that I might
do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might
have the praise of men;
I was given weakness, that I
might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I
might enjoy life;
I was given life, that I might
enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for —
but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my
unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all men,
most richly blessed.

The Glorious Deeds of God

(Psalm 78:1-4)

Peter Rode

My mother was very proud of her heritage. She traced our family tree all the way back to the time of the wars between Scotland and England, and discovered who our forefathers were. She would take every opportunity to read up about those old characters and delighted in telling stories about them. She had a large picture of one of them—lord Graham of Montrose, no less—hanging in our sitting room at home. There were also pictures of our family coat–of–arms and other heraldry hanging on the wall. Mother tried to imbue her children with the sense of who we were and where we had come from. She wanted us to be proud of our heritage!

> *"God is alive and active and is doing glorious deeds today!"*

David shared the same idea as my mom. In Psalm 78:4 he sang, "...we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done." Genealogies were very important to the Israelites; hence, the long lists of who begat whom. It's important to know who we are and where we come from. It's important to be proud of our heritage! Not in a fleshly sense, of course, but in a spiritual one. I believe that is why God revealed to us His working through the nation of Israel, and that's why reminders were left for the people to hand down to the next generation. Reminders like the stone tablets on which the ten commandments were written, the altar left on the bank of the Jordan River where they entered Palestine, and the Passover meal eaten each year to commemorate their freedom from Egypt.

Among Christians we have some great reminders as well. One of them is the Lord's Supper, which we participate in as it reminds us of the death, burial, resurrection and new covenant of Jesus (Matthew 26:26-28). Another is the cross, which reminds us of the love that God has for us in Christ (Romans 5:6-8). But the questions we need ask ourselves are, "How well are we telling our children about our heritage?" "How proud are they of their family, the

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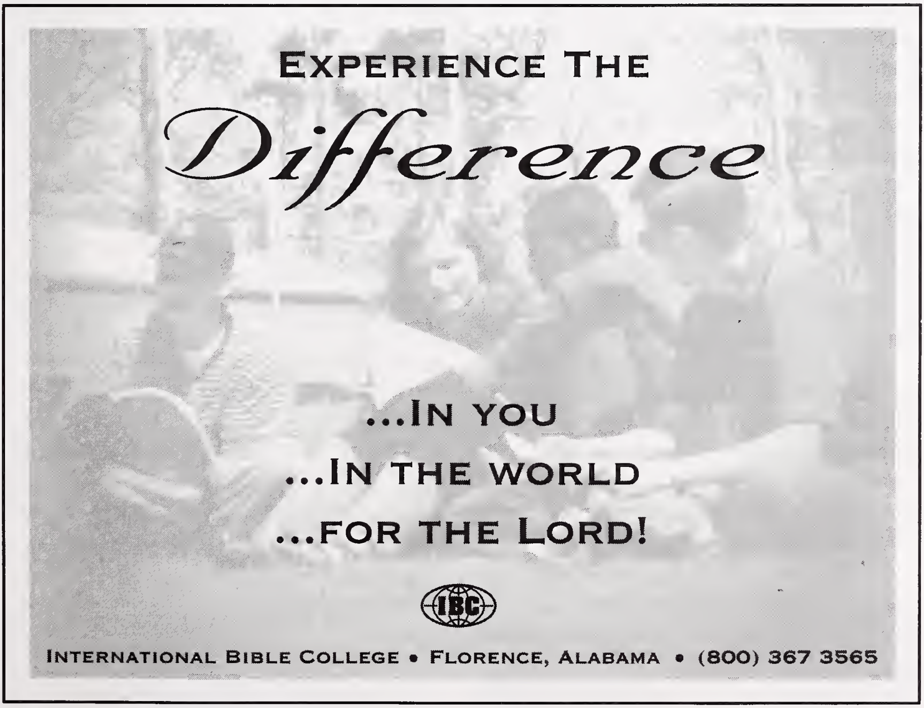
church?" "How well do they know Jesus?" To answer those questions we need in turn to ask a few more. "Do we believe that the God we worship is the One who split the rocks in the desert to provide water for the thirsty, and is still able to do so today (cf. Psalm 78:15)?" "Do we believe that God can spread a table in the desert today under any circumstance as He did long ago (cf. Psalm 78:19)?" And if you do, when have our children seen God active in our lives?

My point is this: we need not only tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of God which were done long ago, but need also to be conscious of the glorious deeds God is doing in our lives today. And we need to make our children aware of them. God is not merely a figure in history like Abraham Lincoln, whom we can only learn about in history books. *God is alive and active and is doing glorious deeds today!*

Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.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I Forget – What Causes Laryngitis?

TIM SENSING

After the examination Doc Brown explained, "There is nothing physically wrong with you. From every indication, you should be able to speak normally. However, I do have a diagnosis. You have amnesia. You cannot speak that which you do not remember."

Although the above scenario may be on shaky ground medically, the linguistic diagnosis is sound. One loses identity when one is unable to remember the past. With the lost identity come the inability to articulate. Amnesia causes laryngitis.

God gave instructions to Israel concerning hospitality. The foreigner dwelling among them was to be treated as one of the family. "Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord you God" (Leviticus 19:33-34). Their memories of Egypt prompted them to practice the Golden Rule—treat others how you would desire them to treat you under the same circumstances. But, if Israel were to forget the harsh treatment handed out by the Egyptians, their amnesia would lead to treating others harshly.

One day, Jesus met nine amnesiacs and one leper. When they saw Him, they stood at a distance and called out with a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When He saw them, He said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except for this foreigner?" The man responded, "They have gone to the priest to complain loudly of their laryngitis." Then Jesus said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." And the man never spoke softly again.

Your praise, thanksgiving, and worship to God depend upon your memory of who He is and what He has done on our behalf. Your confession depends upon your memory of your sinfulness. Your witness of the gospel depends upon your memory of your personal reconciliation. Amnesia chokes the voice, muting your praise, confession, and witness. And when you speak, you will proclaim falsehoods, lies, rumors, boastings, squabbles, innuendo, complaints, malice, flattery, slander and the like.

If you find yourself unable to speak of the things above, it's time to take a personal history lesson. When you remember the love and grace of God poured forth abundantly into your life, you cannot *not* speak.

As the hectic day crowds your thoughts, remember.

Tim Sensing, who formerly preached for the Lexington Church of Christ in Lexington, SC, now works with Abilene Christian University in Abilene, TX.

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Needs People Expect to Have Met in the Church

What People Expect from Church

1. People seek the church yearning to be understood.

They search for a church that can reach sensitively through their feelings of isolation and touch them. People have always needed to feel understood, and that need seems especially pressing today.

2. People turn to the church yearning to understand.

The alternatives facing people at each stage of life today are many and are often ominous. Therefore, people seek meanings that soothe their fears. Sometimes the primary reason people yearn to understand is to help them maintain order and equilibrium in their lives. The church is also looked to for understandings that will transform their lives.

3. People come to the church yearning to belong.

People come with their needs to feel close to others. Individuals long for the companionship of those who can assure them that they are acceptable and are not alone.

4. People go to the church yearning for hope.

Individuals thirst for confirmation of the significance of their yesterdays, and assurances that the promises of God will be kept. Our current culture is wish riddled, but not particularly hope filled. Stimulating hope in people's hearts is critically needed now, and will continue to be in the future.

Connecting With Those Needs from the Pulpit

These needs have four specific implications for those preachers and church leaders who accept the challenge of meeting them.

1. Preaching that reaches out.

People long for words of life from their preacher. Fruitful preaching has always been rooted in the lived experiences of the congregation. Preaching will be effective when it conveys a deep understanding of human pain and struggles, and of hopes and joys. People will then know someone has broken through their loneliness. *Sermon preparation, consequently, will begin by the preacher being with the people.*

2. Teaching that connects.

Teaching will begin with those who come to learn and will involve a great deal of listening. Teachers will identify with their students, thus learning to understand. *People who feel understood will be free to lean and experience growth.*

3. Church leadership that cares.

Belonging will be rooted in assurance that the community has definition and permanency. Kinship will be anchored when the church leadership opens the congregation to new ways of being brother and sister with all people, while serving the congregation's identity. *People who feel loves will feel secure enough to trust.*

4. Congregational life that embraces.

When the church life embraces each individual with a human touch, kinship can become a reality. *People will be sustained for their journey when they experience Jesus' care from the church.*

(Source: Robert L. Randall, **What People Expect from Church: Why Meeting the Needs of People is More Important Than Church Meetings**. Nashville: Abingdon, 1992. This excerpt is quoted in *Ministry Advantage*, May/June, 1996.)

Serving Your Enemies

Terry Graves

“*It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love*” (John 13:1). It was the day before Jesus’ death, but rather than being preoccupied with thoughts of His own problems—His impending death, sin–bearing, and glorification—Jesus was totally absorbed with His love for His disciples. Knowing that He would soon go to the cross to dies for the sins of the world, He was still concerned with the needs and concerns of twelve men who would soon desert Him in His hour of need. One would deny Him. Another would betray Him. The others would desert Him. And in love Jesus would serve them.

> *It would be easy to understand resentment. Easier still to understand bitterness. But all Jesus had was love.*

Jesus loved with the heart of a humble servant. It takes humility to serve those who let you down, disown you, and betray you. Our text literally says that Jesus “loved them to the end.” The phrase “to the end” in Greek is *eis telos*, and it means this: He loved them to perfection. He loved them to the uttermost. He loved them with the total fullness of love. That is the nature of Christ’s love. It is amazing that in those last hours of life, Jesus was not thinking of Himself. He was loving His disciples—those who would desert and betray Him. At the moment when most would have been wholly concerned with self, He selflessly humbled himself to meet the needs of others.

Christ’s love and His humility are inseparable. He could not have been so consumed with a passion for serving others if he had been primarily concerned with Himself. His servant love would be put on display in what then happened in John 13. “*The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet…*” (John 13:2-5).

Footwashing was a lowly, menial task and was normally performed by a servant. On this occasion there was no servant and no one else volunteered. Jesus’ action was during the meal, not upon arrival, and was done deliberately to make a point. It was a lesson in humility, setting forth the principle of selfless service. Jesus said that He was setting an example for them to follow and that He wanted them to love as He had loved (John 13:15,34). This act was an expression of love for His disciples, including Judas. Even Judas had the Lord to kneel down before him and wash his feet. All the while, Jesus knew about the wicked betrayal being harbored in Judas' heart.

It seems that the more men hated Jesus and sought to hurt Him, the more He expressed love to them. It would be easy to understand resentment. Easier still to understand bitterness. But all Jesus had was love. He met the greatest injury with the greatest of love. Jesus reached out to Judas, making His love all the more wonderful.

Christ lived what He taught; He walked His talk. He taught people to love, to serve and to give, expecting nothing in return. *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also...Give to everyone who asks you...Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that...But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:27-36).

Jesus calls us to love our enemies. He calls us to humbly serve those who hurt and mistreat us. He calls us to seek their highest good, pray for them, act better than we feel and treat them the way we want to be treated. Will we obey the Lord? I know there is someone in your family or your workplace or your congregation who has hurt you and who needs you to love them. God wants you to serve that person, and to do that you will have to humble yourself. You will have to nail your ego to the cross.

However, think of the reward. The reward is this: you get to be like Christ! You get to manifest His love. You get to prove that God is your Father. Now that's a reward!

Terry Graves preaches for the Shelby Church of Christ in Shelby, NC.

Brotherhood News

— MARK HUDSON

MOCKSVILLE, NC... "Food Lion Shopping Days" to benefit Carolina Bible Camp will be November 16,17 & 18. The camp will receive 5% of total Food Lion sales with a voucher on these dates. Last year the camp raised $2,106.26. Contact Judy Swicegood for vouchers or information. Phone: (704) 751-2478, or e-mail: JudySwice@aol.com.

DUNCAN, SC... On August 1, Southeastern Children's Home was licensed to operate a home for eight adolescent boys in Union. The main campus and girls cottages are located in Duncan. The annual dinner for SECH on Saturday, October 24 will celebrate 30 years of service to needy children.

Righteous Judgment

MARK HUDSON

Most institutions have legends and lore about their early days. The college I attended had dozens of legends. For example, professors were notoriously underpaid when the school first opened. One absent-minded professor was so poor he had only one pair of pants. He was given a second pair of trousers and wore them that afternoon. Not knowing about the new pants, his wife saw his "only pair" on the bed and assumed the worst. She ran across campus waving his britches thinking he went to class half–dressed.

THE RUSH TO JUDGEMENT HAS OFTEN BEEN A VICE OF PEOPLE WHO CLAIM TO KNOW GOD.

Another story involved paychecks. It was reported that teachers earned $35 a month. A student, however, observed a professor cashing a check for $105 soon after the semester started. Rumors started, and accusations were made about corruption, dishonesty, and over-paid staff. Eventually the truth was known. The sacrificial professor had not been paid any salary for the last three months of the spring semester, and the college was making up back wages.

As these college legends suggest, some false assumptions are comical. Unfortunately, jumping to conclusions often leads to tragic results. Reputations can be unjustly tarnished. Half-truths become grist for the rumor mill. Smear, innuendo, and lies are circulated as gospel truth. Gossip replaces fact-finding. Destruction reigns rather than reconciliation.

Idealistic college students are not the only ones to err in judgment. I Samuel 1 tells of the experienced priest and prophet Eli. Observing Hannah fervently praying for a son, he falsely accused her of being drunk. Oddly enough, the son born to Hannah also jumped to false conclusions. Samuel was to anoint the successor to Saul's throne in I Samuel 16. He assumed that the older brothers of David would be king. God reminded Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature... for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (vs.).

The rush to judgment has often been a vice of people who claim to know God. Self-appointed enforcers of divine law often make judgments based upon insufficient evidence or a misunderstanding of God's will. In John 7, Jesus answered criticism that he violated the Sabbath by healing. His whole character and identity was called into question for this alleged breaking of law. Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment (vs. 24).

Be careful in your judgment of others. You may not have all the facts. Your snap conclusions may be wrong, embarrassing, and destructive. Jesus warned in Matthew 7:1-5 that the manner in which we judge will be the standard by which we are judged.

Mark Hudson serves as Brotherhood News Editor for ***Carolina Christian*** *and preaches for the Whiskey Rd. church in Aiken, SC.*

Judging

PAUL JARRETT

The portion of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 7:1-12 opens with one of the more hotly debated texts as to its meaning and application ("Do not judge lest you be judged") and concludes with one of the most oft–quoted statements in this sermon, the Golden Rule ("however you want people to treat you, so treat them"). I would like to suggest that the key to understanding the point Jesus is making about judging lies in our application of the Golden Rule to the manner in which we judge others. What would it mean if we were to judge others the way we want others to judge us?

What would it mean if we were to judge others the way we want others to judge us?

Would it mean that we would never want anyone to pass judgment on anything we say and do? For some people this might be exactly how they feel about any kind of judging. These are the ones Jesus may have had in mind when He warned us not to cast pearls before swine, lest they turn and tear you to pieces. However, I do believe most sincere disciples want to be told when they are doing things that are wrong so that they can ultimately do what is right.

Would it mean that we would want people to constantly criticize us and be suspicious of our every act and motive? I dare say that none of us would want to be judged in this manner. It certainly would not be edifying for us. This is the kind of hypocrisy and hyper–criticism that Jesus warned against in talking about passing judgment on others.

Would it mean that we would want people to approach us in love when we are wrong, helping us to do better? Yes, I believe this is the kind of judgment Jesus is commending. It provides the direction which every conscientious seeker desires. It is the kind of nourishment that a good father gives to the child he loves. It does not declare the guilty to be innocent, thus leaving them in danger of eternal judgment. However, neither does it lead us to mistreat those whom God loves. If our judgment does harm, we may be certain that our judgment is contrary to the Law and the Prophets, which summed up the Golden Rule, and by Paul's observation that "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (Romans 13:10).

Paul Jarrett preaches for the Naples Church of Christ in Naples, FL.

Find the Good and Praise It.......

JOHNNY MELTON

Hugh Hewitt, in his book *The Embarrassed Believer*, relates the basis for his support for former Education Secretary and Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander's 1996 Presidential Campaign. Prompted by a speech by Alexander in 1994, Hewitt investigated the politician's background and judged him to be, in his opinion, "the best man running for president." Hewitt explains, "By that I mean he evidenced the clearest combination of good policies, electability, and commitment to godly service. Yes, he was, and I suspect remains, an ambitious man. And, yes, he articulated a bunch of political positions I agreed with. But mostly I could envision him speaking plainly and effectively to the American people about the need for moral renewal."

> "My hero is God."

It would be easy to begin a critical assessment of the immorality with which we have been inundated by the winner of that 1996 Presidential election. However, something else caught my attention in Hewitt's assessment of Lamar Alexander. Hewitt noted another reason for being drawn to Alexander's campaign: "I was deeply persuaded by that first speech because Alexander invoked the motto (and I believe he said "epitaph") of his late friend, the African-American novelist Alex Haley, who wrote *Roots: Find the good and praise it.*

Even if it is not on Haley's tombstone, even if I got the story wrong, the force of that simple directive is immense. It is, in fact, the largest weapon in the arsenal of American renewal and spiritual rebirth. If only the Christians in the United States embraced and practiced this, the results would be astonishing."

I remember Paul's exhortation to the Philippians along these lines, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable; if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in meùput it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:8-9).

And so, instead of lamenting the deplorable details of the "Starr Report," let me remind you of a comment Chicago Cub Sammy Sosa made to an interviewer. Sosa, of course, is (at this writing) tied with Mark McGwire for the lead in homeruns this season with 63. He is leading the major leagues in runs-batted-in with 154. A report from ESPN relates that Sammy was recently asked, "Who is your hero?" Sammy Sosa replied, "My hero is God." ESPN also reported that Sosa had just sent 250 computers to schools in the Dominican Republic, his native country.

Find the good and praise it. Way to go, Sammy!

---

*Johnny Melton serves the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS, and is a former editor of **Carolina Christian**.*

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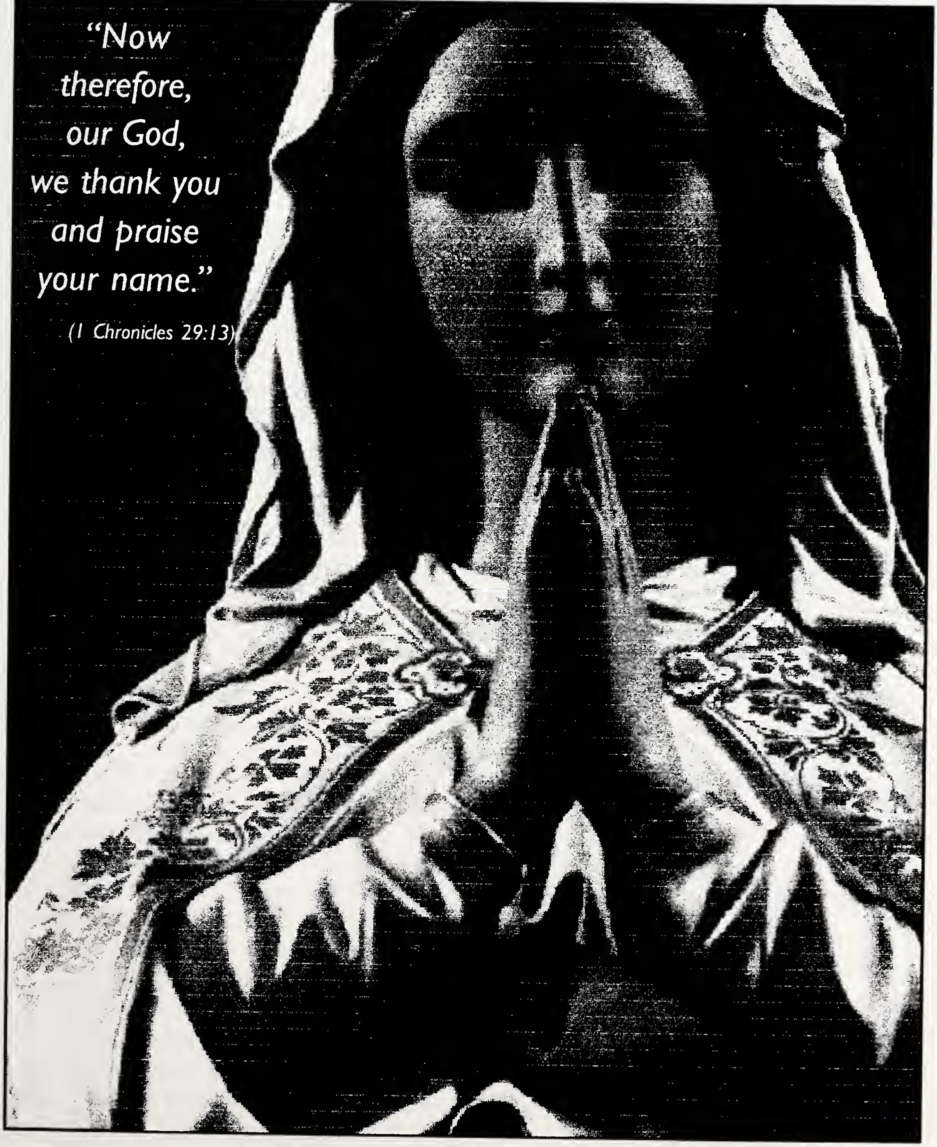

"Now
therefore,
our God,
we thank you
and praise
your name."

(1 Chronicles 29:13)

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Don't Lose Heart

DENNIS CONNER

A couple of years ago I spoke on the phone with a preaching brother. At first he made some light–hearted remarks about his ministry, but that was only to ease the frustration, disappointment and sense of failure that he was feeling. He then got down to brass tacks. He said to me, "Sometimes it just doesn't seem that the returns are worth the investment."

He wasn't being self–seeking or mercenary. This man had spent years in service to the Lord on another continent, giving himself wholeheartedly and sacrificially to the cause of Christ. No, my friend was being human and honest. He was tired of giving his heart and energies to people, only to have them respond with criticism, complaining and complacency. He felt that he was losing his heart for ministry.

Virtually everyone and anyone who has ever given themselves to serving others can point to a time when they grew tired of it. Even Paul, the great apostle that he was, had those times when he grew tired of the cost of investing his life in the lives of others. If anyone ever had a reason to give it up and quit, it was Paul. Yet, he said to the Corinthian church, "we do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1, 16). Not once, but twice, "we do not lose heart."

What was his secret? What kept him going? First, Paul understood that human weakness opened his life to the experience of the all–sufficiency of God's power. He wrote, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all–surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). "Jars of clay, " or "earthen vessels," is a metaphor for our weakness. Paul saw himself as a clay pot, fragile and easily broken. Yet, in those ancient times, items of great value were often kept in such jars. It amazed Paul that in spite of his own human weakness, God had chosen to entrust to him the greatest treasure of all, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (v. 6).

Why did God work this way? So that it would be evident that "this all–surpassing power is from God and not from us." Our human weakness merely becomes God's opportunity. The success of the servant life and the vitality of Christian experience do not derive from one's own ability, but from the power of God. The Almighty breaks through our weakness and fragility and accomplishes His holy purposes. Thus, the source of Paul's strength lay not in himself, but in the grace of God.

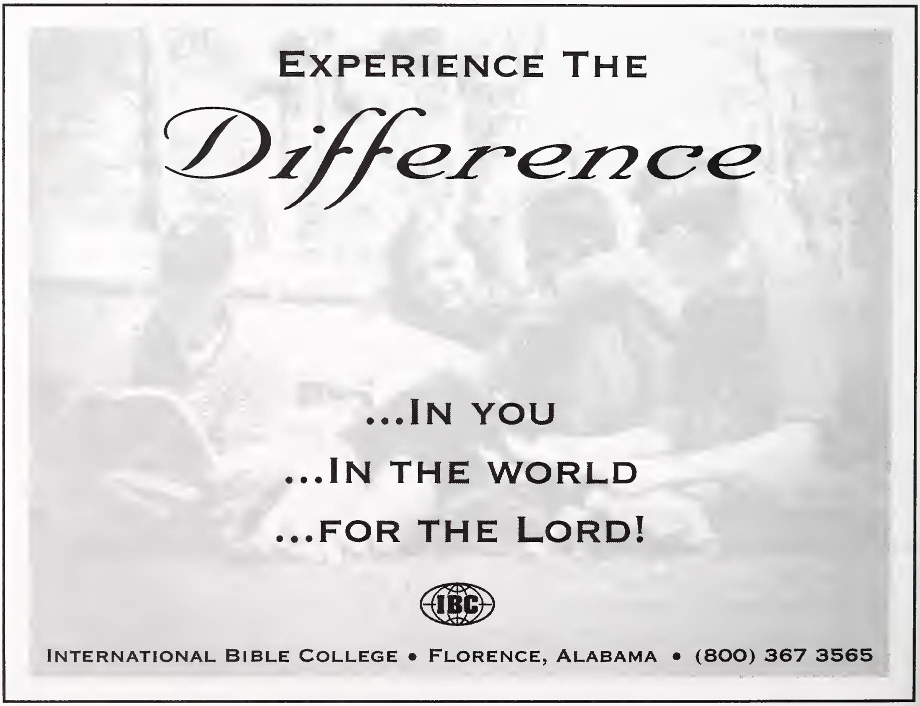
To highlight this truth he used a series of four contrasts (vv. 8-9): "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed..." Hostile forces were pressing in on Paul from every side. It seemed that his life was caught in an olive press. Yet, no matter how burdensome the circumstances, God did not allow Paul to be crushed by them. Grace saw him through. "Perplexed, but not in despair..." Mounting problems and opposition brought anxiety, but Paul did not lose hope. He realized that as long as there is God and His grace, there is hope. "Persecuted, but not abandoned..."

It wasn't that some people merely disliked Paul; they despised him! They tried to stop his ministry, to discredit his character and to refute his message. At Lystra the opposition was so fierce that Paul was dragged outside the city, stoned and left for dead. It might well have appeared to human eyes that Paul was indeed abandoned, but the Lord intervened and did not allow him to die. There were times when Paul was imprisoned—and where was God? In prison with him. When placed on trial for his life, Paul wrote to Timothy that everyone else had abandoned him, "but the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength" (2 Timothy 4:17). "Struck down, but not destroyed." Paul was often knocked down, but he was never knocked out (it may be a well–worn cliché, but it is so applicable here). Circumstances may sometimes be disabling, but they need not be fatal.

Paul trusted God to deliver him, and God never disappointed.

These contrasts powerfully emphasize our human weakness and inability as offset by divine enablement. The extent of God's power is such that it is not merely sufficient to meet the needs of our frailty; rather, the power of God overcomes, surpasses and utilizes all our weaknesses. In his experience of being enabled by God, Paul realized that the life and power of Christ were being revealed through Him (v. 10). Yes, ministering meant suffering, but God would sustain His servants just as He had sustained His Son, and grace would always triumph.

By the eye of faith Paul was able to see



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beyond the immediate trials and circumstances, and he saw that God's saving grace was being multiplied. The Lord was using Paul's trials and adversities, his weakness, to accomplish His own redemptive purposes.

Second, Paul trusted the resurrection power of God. One reason he suffered so much was because of the message that he could not help but to speak. Truth was always getting him into trouble. But speak he must, and would, because "we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence" (2 Corinthians 4:14). He would proclaim the gos-pel, no matter the consequences. He would not be intimidated by men. Even if they should kill him, he possessed the hope instilled by the resurrection power of God! Regardless of what happened, he would still live.

We must realize today that the resurrection power of God has not been diminished. God is still as powerful today as He was then. And if you don't believe that, then you really don't need to be in ministry of any kind. Let people say to us what they will and do what they will; it doesn't matter.

Our hope in the resurrection power and promise of God will sustain us. Further, Paul did not lose heart because he kept a proper focus. He put it this way, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Paul's focus on the unseen, eternal realities enabled him to endure the troubles of the seen world.

His attitude here is really quite remarkable when you stop to think about it. Light afflictions? Even a casual review of his catalog of hardships endured in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 reveals that his troubles were anything but light. Beatings, persecutions, imprisonments, shipwrecks, stoning, attacks from so–called brethren, daily worries for the churches. I see nothing light about any of that. And momentary? An entire night spent floating about in the sea, awaiting rescue would seem like an eternity to me. But yes, when viewed in the light of eternity and when compared to the glory of the heavenly, everything experienced here is light and momentary.

Whatever troubles we may experience, they will not last forever. The glory that awaits us will! So, maintaining our focus is more than some pie–in–the–sky ideal. It is a matter of survival, a matter of keeping heart. For Paul, the realization of what awaited him made all the suffering, disappointment and pain worthwhile. And so it must be with us.

"What about your friend? Whatever happened to him?" Well, he's still ministering, he still gets frustrated, he still struggles, and God is still using him to His glory!

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Associate Editorial:

How to "Market" the Gospel...

Ron Newberry

When Ben Franklin conceived of lighting the streets of Philadelphia with street lamps, he had a number of choices as to how he could market his idea. He could have given away lots of street lamps as Amos who is now famous did chocolate chip cookies and just hope the idea caught on with the residents. He could have drawn up feasibility studies and a cost analysis and presented it to the city fathers for consideration. He could have calculated the rate of crime decline if the streets were safer at night because of better lighting. Perhaps there are a dozen other good marketing techniques, which Ben could have employed. In the final analysis, he chose a simple, direct, cost effective method with an unsophisticated strategy.

Ben Franklin's tactic was to hang a lantern on a long bracket in the front of his house. He made certain that the glass globe stayed clean and polished. Every evening as the sun went down he lit the wick, which kept the front of his house illuminated all night long. When folks walked along the street at night in front of his house, they avoided tripping over the sharp, uneven stones in the pavement. They soon found it a pleasant place to walk and talk under his gentle light in the evenings. Before long, other houses began to place lights in front of their houses and the city soon recognized the need for the entire city to have streetlights.

As I reread that episode recently I reflected on our approaches to marketing the gospel. Please understand that I don't want to be guilty of debasing the gospel by discussing marketing strategy. I simply mean that we have done less than a stellar job in making people want what we know they need in order to illuminate their dark lives. Maybe we have spent too much time thinking of the gospel as something to market as we would chicken sandwiches or automobiles or the next event at the coliseum.

Perhaps we are spending too much time telling people we have good news.

Again, I don't want to be misunderstood to mean that we should stop telling people about Jesus. I'm just saying that maybe we would have a more receptive audience if we first hung Jesus out in front of our homes and we let others see how He has illuminated our lives, our families and our churches. Maybe if they saw what He was doing positively for us, they might get the idea that He could do the same for them. Then when folks are ready for an explanation of the good news we would be able to share the message of Jesus being the light of the world.

The point is we must be an example in addition to telling others about the light that has come into the world. To "market" the gospel and "sell" the lost world on the light of the gospel, we must do more than put out a few brochures, post a few flyers and wait for them to beat a path to our door.

We must first show them with our lives the effect of living in the light, how it illuminates our path so we don't stumble over the sharp, uneven stones in life's pathway. Once they appreciate the benefits of having Jesus in their lives they are much more likely to hold Jesus up to shine in their homes and families.

He did say after all that if He were lifted up, He would draw people to Himself (John 12:32). Maybe Ben Franklin has the right idea when it comes to marketing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The true light that enlightens everyone came into the world (John 1:9). Let's try lifting Him up so that all men can see Him and be attracted to Him.

.....A Dear Sister Goes Home

DENNIS CONNER

We have received several glowing responses to the articles in the June and September issues of Carolina Christian by Natasha Kudrya, a dear friend from Donetsk, Ukraine. The heartfelt tenderness, passion and devotion of her "Love Letters to Jesus" touched many of our readers. It is with very mixed emotions that I tell you that Natasha went to be with Jesus early on Monday morning, September 28, 1998. She died of complications associated with acute leukemia, a condition with which she had been diagnosed only ten days earlier. Natasha was 32 years old.

When Natasha became ill she was in the process of organizing a family campaign that Phil Stapp, Paul Jarrett and my wife and I were to conduct for the Gorky Palace congregation in Donetsk. She was also planning on translating for us. We received news of her passing only three days before we were to leave for Ukraine. It was devastating news for Terre and me, personally, and profoundly impacted many of the Christians throughout Ukraine. However, thanks be to God, we were all far more profoundly affected by her life and friendship.

While in Donetsk I spoke with one of our mutual friends and fellow campaign–workers there who had visited with Natasha two days before her death. She said to her friend, "Over the past year I have been traveling so much and working with so many campaigns, one after the other, that my faith had become mechanical. But since I have been here in the hospital, my faith has been renewed." She went on to tell her friend, "Sometimes, I can even hear Jesus whispering to me." Just two months earlier, when seemingly in perfectly good health, she had told another friend, "Sometimes I just want to go on home." And on September 28 the Lord granted that wish.

It is a truism, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.' "

NEWBERRY NAMED ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The Board of Directors of Carolina Christian Publications, Inc., announces that Ron Newberry will be the new Associate Editor, succeeding Jim Mullican. Brother Mullican, who had served as Associate Editor for more than five years, recently moved to Channelview, Texas, to work with the Channelview Church of Christ.

Brother Newberry is a member of the Board of Directors of Carolina Christian Publications, Inc., and has preached for 16 years for the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He and his wife, Jenny, have been married for 31 years and have two daughters. Kim is a pharmicist in Greensboro and Monica is a junior at Lipscomb University. Ron's education includes B.S. and M.S. degrees in communication from Murray State University and an Mth from Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, TN. He is presently working on a doctorate in Church Growth at Harding Graduate School. In addition to writing for Carolina Christian, Ron has had articles published in a number of brotherhood periodicals.

We are happy to announce this addition to the staff of Carolina Christian and ask that you keep all of us in your prayers as together we seek to make Carolina Christian a useful instrument in the hands of God for the growth and building–up of His kingdom.

The Law of Christ

PAUL JARRETT

"A text removed from its context is merely a pretext." I don't know who first said this, but it expresses a valid point regarding biblical interpretation. It warns against "proof–text" preaching; that is, preparing your sermon and then accumulating texts to make a point without regard to their context.

This warning against proof–text preaching has generally been aimed at denominational preachers. However, it is applicable to all preachers, including those within churches of Christ. We must be careful that we are not guilty of proof–text preaching in the name of having a "thus saith the Lord" for all we say and do.

It is certainly commendable (yes, necessary) for us to be guided by God's word in all we say and do. However, we must be certain that we are in fact listening to what God says and not merely someone else's bias. In legal terms, I fear that many preachers are sometimes guilty of "leading the witness" in their handling of the testimony of Scripture. Some seem determined to attach their own interpretation to God's word, rather than allowing

(continued on page 10)

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the context to tell us what God meant in a given text.

One of the best (or worst?) examples of proof–text preaching is seen in how references to "the law of Christ" in I Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2 are often handled. The phrase "law of Christ" is removed from its context and used as a pretext for binding on people as a condition of salvation or fellowship whatever "commands of Christ" make up the preacher's view of the "law of Christ."

A careful examination of the context of these two passages provide us with both the definition of and an example of the law of Christ. In Galatians 6:2 Paul says it is fulfilled when we "bear one another's burdens." In I Corinthians 9:21 he tells us how this law was exemplified in his own life by his willingness to make himself "a slave to all, that I might win the more."

It is important that I point out here that the law of Christ will lead us to seek to do all that God requires. However, when properly understood, it will cause us to do so with the proper motivation and sense of priority.

Furthermore, it will maintain our focus on our own character, rather than lead us down the path of passing judgment on others. The proof of what I've just said is found in an examination of some other New Testament texts which serve to further define the law of Christ.

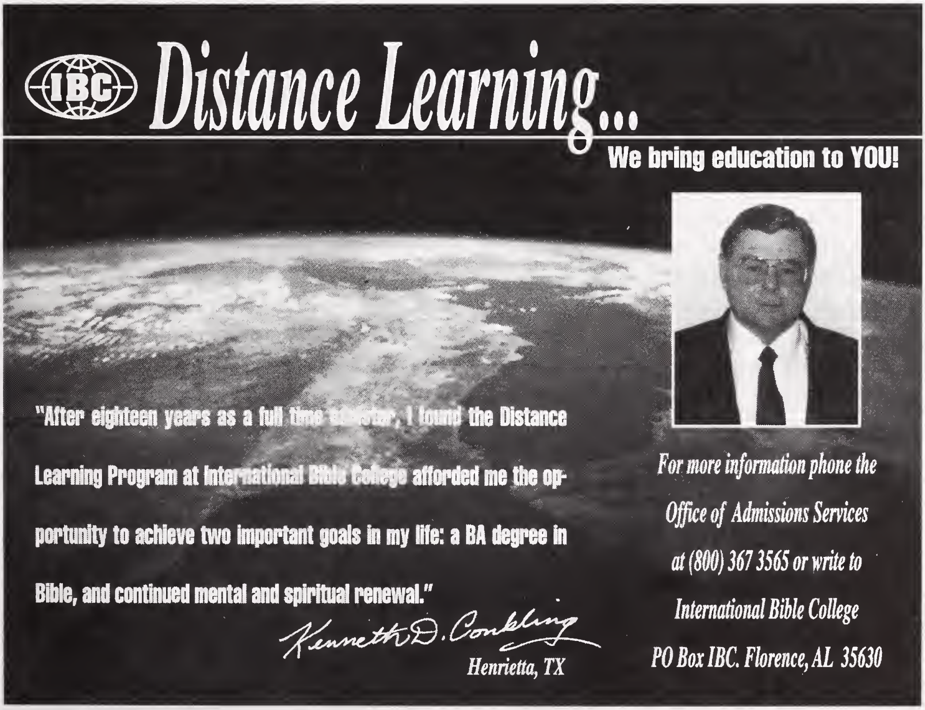
In Romans 13:8, 10 Paul makes it evident that the summation of all the law is found in our calling to love our neighbor. This is the royal law (cf. "law of Christ") which Jesus exemplified in His life on earth (Romans 15:2-3) and which James said we are "doing well" when we keep it (James 2:8).

In I John 2:3-4 we have another text which has been subject to abuse. In these verses John says that those who know Christ will "keep his commandments." While this ultimately may be deemed to include all that Jesus taught, it is important in our handling of this text to have an appreciation for the one commandment which John is emphasizing. He makes it plain that the commandment which concerns him and is to be given priority is the old commandment made new in Christ to "love one another" (cf. I John 2:7-10 and John 13:34-35). This commandment is identical to James' royal law and is the cornerstone of the law of Christ. Any interpretation of the law of Christ which leads to "burden–binding" rather than "burden–bearing" violate both the spirit and the letter of the law of Christ.

Prior to his reference to the law of Christ in Galatians 6:2, Paul had already introduced this royal law when he wrote, "For the whole law if fulfilled in one word, in the statement, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14). He introduced this royal law in a context in which he is dealing primarily with those who are engaged in constructing their own "modified" version of the old legal system which had been abolished in Christ. Paul makes it plain that the new covenant was not to be reduced to a modified, slightly improved version of the old legal code. The new covenant is just that, new—it is powered by grace and leads to "faith working though love" (Galatians 5:1-6).

Paul conceded in Galatians 5:13 that some might elect to turn their freedom into "an opportunity for the flesh." However, he had already acknowledged that the majority had been "running well" until some decided to impose their own version of the law of Christ on them (see Galatians 5:7). Furthermore, he made it plain elsewhere that the real deterrent to license was not to be found in the multiplying of commandments (see Colossians 2:20-23); rather, Paul saw the deterrent to the abuse of Christian freedom to lie in calling upon Christians to "through love, serve one another" (Galatians 5:13). He knew that is people truly learn to focus on the things of the Spirit they will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

I realize the understanding of the law of Christ set forth here will not necessarily be accepted by everyone. However, I trust that each one will examine what I have said regarding the law of Christ in the context in which this law is mentioned. I would pray that all of God's people would place their confidence in Christ's direction and not in another's interpretation of His direction. I believe we can learn from all our fellow servants, but ultimately we must all seek to be servants of Christ, and not men (see Matthew 23:8-10 and I Corinthians 3:1-5, 18-23).



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CHURCH FEATURE:

The Sylva Church of Christ

BOB RIGDON

The Elders of the Sylva Church of Christ believe that evangelistic efforts at home and abroad are the keys to an effective work. We know that methods formerly used are no longer producing results; for example, holding a Gospel Meeting and inviting people to come in most cases is not as effective as it once was. In the present age of mass media, especially TV and the Internet, we must learn to use these tools for the Lord.

We have a weekly 30 minute TV program titled Happiness Explained. We believe that if we can communicate to the people how godliness is profitable for the life that now is, they will likely listen to the rest of I Timothy 4:8, "Godliness that is profitable for the life to come." Our goal in all our preaching is to have a balance of these two points.

We also believe it is vital that a talented Christian make a personal visit to all who respond to the TV program within two weeks after they visit us or contact us. We have tried to do this consistently and it has been successful. Personal work scripturally done is essential for church growth.

There has to be the person–to–person teaching. Not all Christians have the talent to do this work.

This TV program has been very successful in the former USSR. From the Donetsk, Ukraine television station we have had 254 requests for baptism in 1997. Hans Novak reports that he knows of seven new congregations begun in the Donetsk area due to the TV program.

Campus ministry has also been an important part of our outreach. Where there is a University/College present, we feel it is vital that the church have a student center and a minister to serve that population. We have been very fortunate in having several effective evangelists in our setting at Western Carolina University. Presently, Vernon Dugger is doing an excellent work there.

We also have a weekly newspaper column, "Bible Questions and Bible Answers," which continually places the Gospel and the Lord's church before the people in our county.

This year to date God has blessed us with 14 being baptized. Since the Sylva church began with four members, God has blessed the growth to a present membership of 165. Over 250 people have obeyed Jesus through the years, but most have moved on to other towns.

The Bible is our only authority and we must continually study and pray for wisdom. Customs and traditions change and we realize that we must change as they change, but we must never change the commandments of God (I Corinthians 8-10; Romans 14:1-15:10). With God's help, we are striving to keep the balance.

Bob Rigdon has preached for the Sylva church for 41 years and also serves as one of its elders. He may be contacted at PO Box 101, Sylva, NC 28779.

Correction

In the "Youth Matters " column of the September issue, page 10, Mark 16:16 was quoted as "but whoever does not believe will not be condemned." It should have read, "but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Words

AMOS ALLEN

We use words all the time. Writing, reading, talking, listening, thinking. They are tools that help us communicate.

I want to be comfortable with words, like an old family pet. I want them to flow from me, like a stream pouring from a mountainside. I want to use them skillfully, like a carpenter with a hammer. I want to, but it took me ten minutes to write the last three sentences!

Many people use words like I use a hammer—with great difficulty. It can be hard to tell what we want to say based on what comes out of our mouths. And yet, somehow, communication happens.

God is known through words. We read the Bible, we hear the preacher, we listen to the teacher, we tell the story. God took a big chance on us being able to communicate well (the Spirit must work overtime helping this process). Jesus was obviously good with words. He knew how to talk to people. But was He just a good storyteller, or something more?

Jesus knew people and He knew God. He talked to the people about His father in ways they could hear (farming, animals, money, etc.). He said things they didn't want to hear, but they got the message. He spoke words that gave them hope and encouragement. "We use so many clumsy words" the song says, but that doesn't seem to be true with Jesus.

I want to say two things. The first is, listen to God by reading Jesus.

Watch God when His Son changes water to wine, or walks on it, or offers it to thirsty people, or asks for some. Let all those words about the Savior be your diet and your desire. Take a story and put yourself in it. Live in it for a few minutes or a few days. Experience it so you can hear Jesus more clearly than maybe you have in the past. When He gives a command, surround yourself with mental images of now to obey Him. Listen with the intent of growing, changing, maturing. The Gospels are not just stories; they are the foundation of the church. Without them, we Christians are dysfunctional.

The second thing is, talk like Jesus did. Talk in ways people can understand. Speak lovingly. Tell the truth. Relate who God is and does. Encourage, warn, give hope and add strength with your words. Offer words that are like cold water to the thirsty. Proclaim words that give light, that show the way. With time and practice, we can become comfortable and skilled at using words that make a difference.

Amos Allen can be contacted at 631 Meadowbrook Rd., Asheboro, NC 27203.

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Holy Leisure

MARK HUDSON

Ask most people how they are doing and the answer is "busy!" Sound familiar?

Busyness is a way of life affecting many social, economic, and age groups.

Ask the young professional trying to get established in the company. Busy. Ask the young mother who cares for the kids and works a job outside the home. Busy. Ask people retired from the work force who wonder how they ever had time to work. Busy. Ask the student who is gone from the home fourteen hours a day and still does homework late at night. Busy. Ask the entrepreneur who throws himself into a business to keep it alive. Busy. Ask the bread-winner who works three part-time jobs to buy food for a struggling family. Busy. The world makes many demands that keep us busy.

Much of our busyness appears to be related to survival, but we do live in an affluent society. Our affluence complicates our schedule even more. There are trips to make, theme parks to visit, movies to watch, balls to bat, goals to score, trail to hike and boats to float. Beyond the fun things, we face the time pressures of keeping up with our possessions: the laundry pilegrows, the grass needs mowing, the cars must be washed, and the pine needles are always falling. Busy. On further examination, our busyness often results from our own choices.

To tame the busyness beast we strive to manage our time. Expressions like "Day Runner", "Day Timer", "Franklin System", and "To Do List" fill our vocabulary. We buy time management books from authors like Stephen Covey and fail to read them because we don't have time. Unfortunately, our approach to managing time is akin to sitting on over–stuffed suitcase in a futile attempt to snap the latches. Something has to give. Human busyness is really not new. Perhaps the things that vie for our attention are more numerous, but people of all ages have been tempted to schedule more than they could do. David understood this temptation when the Holy Spirit inspired him to write, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalms 46:10). The ancients used a Latin expression: Otium Sanctum, or holy leisure.

This attribute meant being able to take time to rest, to enjoy the beauty of God's creation, and to contemplate great biblical truths. Holy Leisure also meant having the ability to live with inner calmness even while going about the activities of the day. Holy leisure was not laziness, rather the commitment to care for the soul through limiting busyness and worry. The words to "Take Time To Be Holy" were written in 1882, but they still speak to our hearts today.

One theme park had an ad campaign that said, "Bet you can't do it all." That's true for life, too. We must choose carefully our commitments with a view toward honoring God. We must avoid being so wrapped up in the physical that we neglect to nurture our soul. May God bless us with holy leisure.

Mark Hudson can be contacted at 2006 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803.

The Rules Don't Apply to Me

JIM MULLICAN

Have you ever noticed how many people seem to feel that way? On a recent visit to another city, we were being shown around, and our guide remarked, "You'll notice that drivers here apply the 'Rule of Fours.' That means that when the light turns red, four more cars will go through it before anyone stops!"

We see the same phenomenon all around us, including those who speed habitually, those who park in the "No Parking" zones, and those who roll on through stop signs. Sometimes the consequences of breaking the traffic laws can be serious—a ticket, a costly accident, a serious injury, or even a fatality.

> *The person who toys with sin, thinking that "I can always repent later and God will forgive me," may be making a fatal mistake.*

However, the consequences of ignoring God's rules are even more serious. The person who toys with sin, thinking that "I can always repent later and God will forgive me," may be making a fatal mistake. Repentance is more than saying "I'm sorry." It's actually being sorry. That's not something that can be calculated, scheduled or planned. One cannot plan to continue in sin for a certain period of time and then repent after that. Sin, like illegal drug use, can quickly become an addiction, and letting go may not be as easy as the sinner once thought. In fact, it can be very difficult indeed. God's rules apply to everyone. The wages of sin is still death (Romans 6:23)—sometimes physical death, but always spiritual death, as well as the death of that which is good and unselfish and loving in our characters. The more we sin, the more those attributes die in our lives.

Human parents tell their children not to play with fire because they want to save their loved ones from excruciating pain. In the same way, God tells those whom He loves to keep away from sin so that we, too, may avoid the excruciating pain of guilt, regret, wasted opportunities, broken relationships, and ultimately, eternal exile from His presence in the devil's hell. Eternity will show that the rules do apply to everyone, and only in the body of Christ may we find true freedom and forgiveness.

Jim Mullican preaches for the Channelview Church of Christ in Channelview, TX. He formerly preached for the Central Haywood church in Clyde, NC, and also served as Associate Editor of Carolina Christian.

Living Holy Lives

Peter Rode

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:15).

Holiness is a word that describes God’s other–worldliness. It’s fundamental meaning is to be “different” or “separate.” The differentness and separateness of God is expressed in the ancient Hebrews confession “...the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). He is the only God and there is no one like Him. He is the Lord of lords and God of gods, and because He is separate and different He demands that His people be that, too! God expects this because He has called us out from the rest of the world to be His covenant people.

The question we ask, however, is how do we, as imperfect people, become holy? After all, we’re just like all the rest of humanity.

Isn’t it an impossible ideal that God calls us to? In answering those questions, we must realize that it’s not about us; it’s about God. It’s God’s presence that makes us holy. When the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, Moses was instructed to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 2:5). It wasn’t that the ground in that area was different or special. The presence of God made it holy. The same is true with us. God dwells in us through His Spirit, and God’s presence makes us different—holy. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

And because we are holy people, we need to act like it! In The Kingdom of God Within You, Leo Tolstoy wrote that “all men of the modern world exist in a continual and flagrant antagonism between their consciences and their way of life.” This sounds like an echo from the writing of Paul and it should make us feel very uncomfortable. Paul wrote, “...God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8).

The problem is that we have been too easily influenced by the world. We don’t expect enough of ourselves, and we don’t allow God to work in our lives so that He can be seen living in us. Our expectations must rise above the world. Pete Rose, the famous baseball player, was being interviewed in spring training the year he was about to break Ty Cobb’s all time hits record. One reporter blurted out, “Pete, you only need 78 hits to break the record. How many at–bats do you think you’ll need to get the 78 hits?”

Without hesitation Pete stared at the reporter and very matter–of–factly said, “78.” The reporter yelled back, “Ah, come on, Pete. You don’t expect to get 78 hits in 78 at bats, do you?” Rose then calmly shred his philosophy with the throngs of reporters who were anxiously awaiting his reply to this seemingly boastful claim. “Every time I step up to the plate, I expect to get a hit! If I don’t expect to get a hit, I have no right to step up in the batter’s box in the first place! If I go up hoping to get a hit, then I probably don’t have a prayer to get a hit. It’s a positive expectation that has gotten me all of the hits in the first place.”

We need to approach life with a victorious, positive attitude, knowing that God is on our side working for and through us. We need to surrender to God.

We need also to develop a consciousness of the presence of the Almighty within us and realize that Christianity is not a matter of just abstaining from certain actions, but that it is also a positive way of life reflecting the character of our Father.

Peter Rode can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

God's Masterpiece

Danny Boggs

When you hear the word "masterpiece," what comes to mind? You probably think of paintings and sculptures closely guarded in the world's foremost museums. But if you are a Christian, you see a masterpiece when you look in the mirror each day! Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." The word "workmanship" indicates that you are the result of the unlimited creativity of the Master Designer. You are God's masterpiece!

Though God is already proud of what He has accomplished in you, you are still a work in progress. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2). As you continue to offer God your mind, body and talents for His use, you will see that He is making you more and more magnificent.

If you allow the Spirit of God to continually shape your life, you will develop qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self–control (Galatians 5:22- 23). If you study the life of Jesus in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you will see exactly what God wants to make of you. No one ever has or ever could live a more spiritually exquisite life on earth than Jesus did!

Jesus wants you to be just like Him. He came into the world as the light to show people out of the darkness of sin (John 3:19-21). He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). He also told His followers, "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see our good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). You life as God's living, breathing masterpiece in the image of Christ causes people to honor the Artist who fashioned you.

God intends to attract others to Himself through you. As He prepared to go back to heaven, Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). You are God's work of art today because someone told you the good news of God's plan for you in Christ. In the same way, it's up to you to find God other canvasses to adorn and lumps of clay to mold. God has added you to His collection of priceless treasures, the church.

Unfortunately, we don't always feel so valuable. One reason God created the church is so that you don't have to be alone in your struggle to reflect His glory. God encourages His church to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

You've heard before, "God doesn't make any junk!" In faith you have offered your life to God, who is graciously molding you into the image of His Son, Jesus. You are God's masterpiece!

This is the last article in a four–part series. Danny Boggs can be contacted at 1975 Haywood Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28791. His e-mail address is: dannyboggs@juno.com. If you have an article you would like to submit for use in this column, please feel free to send it to Danny.

Do You See This Woman?

STEPHEN J. WALLS-MATHIS

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts of both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" (Luke 7:41-42, NIV).

I never liked this parable. It always bothered me to think that some one might love God more than I do. After all, it is obvious that there are some sinners who have been forgiven debts much larger than my own. Right?

Then again, maybe there's more to this parable. Jesus tells the short story one night at a dinner party at the house of Simon, a Pharisee. Jesus has been invited for an evening of food and discussion of the Torah among intelligent company. If Simon was anything like me, he was dressed in his Sunday best and on his best behavior, planning to impress Jesus with his worthiness and knowledge. Instead, he is left wrestling with the difficult questions of faith.

Things do not turn out as planned. The party is interrupted by a woman from the city; a woman of the city. And we know the distinction, don't we? You can almost hear the comments made under the breath of the dinner guests. We hear them so well because they are the kind of comments we have heard before; maybe even comments we have made before. She was one of "those people," with a larger debt of sin than I will ever have.

Jesus interrupts the callous muttering first with this parable about debts, and then with a question. "Simon, do you see this woman?" It's the question He asks of us all. Do you see this woman? Not the problems, the embarrassment, not the reputation or the sin. Do you see this person, this soul, this creature of God who is lost and in need?

That's a painful question, isn't it? How many times have I passed by people in need with my eyes closed to their plight? How many times have I talked to neighbors and coworkers without seeing their desperate need for God?

Now it hits me. I am guilty of spiritual blindness. I have sinned against the Lord by choosing to ignore the lost and hurting in the world. On top of that, I am guilty of the arrogant assumption of my own worthiness of God's favor. I owe a debt as large as any other, a debt I can never pay.

If we are going to be disciples of Christ, then we have to start by doing two things. Number one, we have to admit to our own guilt and sin. Jesus has canceled our debt as well. Let's show Him that we love Him for it.

Number two, we have to open our eyes and see the people around us; people in need, people longing for a savior, people we are called to share the gospel with. We have to stop talking about "sinners" and start talking about Christ. Loving God demands that we keep our eyes, our hearts and our hands open.

Lord, open our eyes so that, like your Son Jesus, we can see people for who they are. Open our hearts so that, like your Son Jesus, we can extend love and grace to the wounded souls around us. And Lord, remind us that our debt of sin has been paid; a debt that was as great as one else's. A debt we could never pay. Teach us what it means to love you.

Stephen J. Walls–Mathis ministers to the Schnectady Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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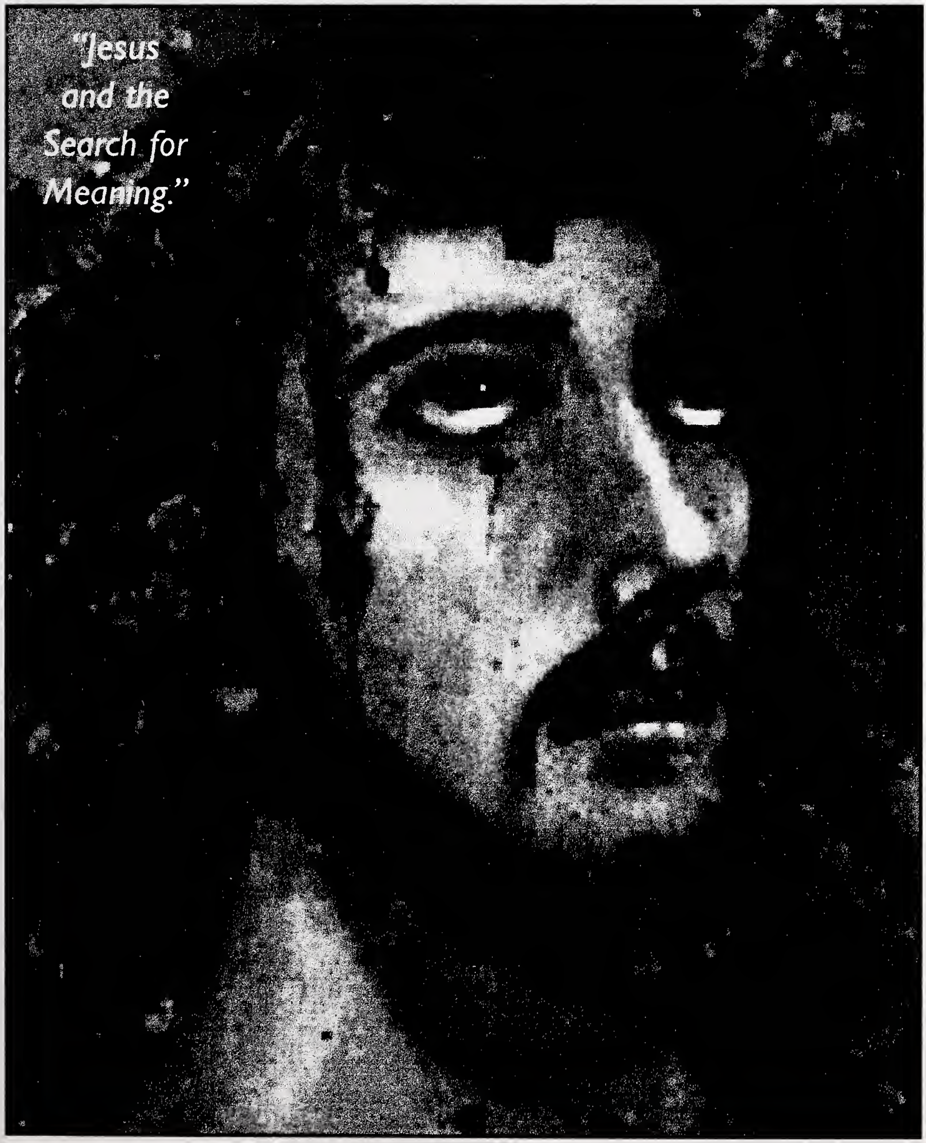

"Jesus and the Search for Meaning."

CAROLINA christian

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Christ and the Meaning of Life

DENNIS CONNER

When we were living in town several years ago the woman who lived in the house behind us left her husband and three young children. The reason? She was tired of being married and needed to "find herself." I read recently about a man who told an acquaintance that he had "found himself" at an EST seminar, at which he had been encouraged to release his inner tensions by screaming obscenities at anyone within earshot.

Stories like these are becoming more and more typical of our society. "What's going on?" we ask. "Is the world going crazy?" What is going on is a loss of meaning and worth. It is no secret that our culture has for the most part lost any sense of the transcendence of God, and the cost to our society has been incomprehensible. When God is removed, the only god left is man himself. What we are witnessing in our Western culture is man's feeble attempt to find meaning in life apart from God. As Charles Colson has correctly observed, the "loss of meaning, purpose and individual dignity is the growing malaise of our times." Consequently, people turn to anything and everything to try to find that meaning—cults, New Age religion, and extremist groups representing just a few of the options.

As an indication of the moral and spiritual malaise afflicting our society, listen to these responses by real people gleaned from a website on the internet in response to the question, "What is the meaning of your life?"

"The meaning of life is analogous to the meaning of a delicious, hot pizza fresh out of the oven. If one ponders it too long, the pizza may get cold. Best to consume it quickly else a single slice may be all one gets" (Danny Craig).

"We are programmed by our genes to do many things, but the number one priority is to survive. Our problem has always been to survive death. But we solved that through the implementation of religion...So by living under the illusion that there is life after death we are more able to enjoy our current life. The problem with modern man is that he has developed knowledge that no longer makes our current religions trustworthy, so we are no longer able to make believe that there is an afterlife...So there is a marked (need) right now for new religions that are more up to date with scientific facts. I wonder what we'll end up with this time?" (Jon Grannes).

"The great thing about life is that there is no meaning to it. We are here for no reason at all, and it's great to be here! Just enjoy the game of life, there is no afterlife. Just the here and now. Everybody's got to live together; why can't we live together? For this is all there is. Enjoy..." (Anonymous).

And then there is this one from Dark Puppy Associated with the White Werewolf, "I think that we are some odd accident of the universe, and soon will create our greatest accident, the genocide of our fellow species and any other living thing around us…For the time being, we shall all enjoy what we have, for those of us who have something. And those who don't, try to get something before you suffer a horrible death of flames consuming and ripping away the flesh of your vital organs. Have a bad day, and let others have good ones!"

Whatever else we might make out of answers like these, there are two things that immediately come to mind. First, people are concerned with the question of meaning, even if they see no meaning. It is an issue that occupies the minds of people in the world. Second, these answers reflect the emptiness, futility and despair that many today are feeling. There is no lack of gurus, saviors, philosophies and cults vying for the affections of the seekers, all promising to fill the void and to provide an answer the question of meaning. In the midst of this plethora of pretenders, Christ stands above them all and proclaims, "I am the way," and the challenge to the church is to communicate to our culture the viability of Christian faith in peoples' search for answers to the complexities of modern life.

We Christians can easily see the tragic moral and spiritual bankruptcy that increasingly threatens the very fabric of our society, and we believe we have the answer. In this issue we will be examining how Christ and His values offer the answer to the questions people are asking and seeking. Although it violates the etiquette of political correctness in this age of seemingly boundless tolerance, we believe that Jesus Christ *is* the way. The three theme articles in this issue present only a very few of the reasons for that belief. It is our hope and prayer that this issue will strengthen your faith and help in some small way to better equip you to share that faith with others.

Prepare to Preach God's Word.

27 "For I did not shrink from

Acts 20:27

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A Lesson from Soap

RON NEWBERRY

A soap maker and his rabbi were out for an afternoon walk. The soap maker was not a religious man even though he maintained a great relationship with the rabbi. The soapmaker said, "I don't see how you can believe that religion is of any value. Just look at the world. Just look at all the misery and problems in the world after hundreds and hundreds of years of religious influence. If there is a God and religion is of any value, how do you account for all the wretchedness and suffering in the world?"

The rabbi didn't speak a word. He continued down the street until they came to a filthy child, in nasty clothes, playing in the street gutter. As they passed the little boy, the rabbi said, "Just look at that child. You say, my friend, that soap has the power to clean people. We've had soap for endless generations. But just look at how filthy that child is. What is the value of soap with such a dirty world around us?"

The old soap maker protested, "But teacher, soap is only valuable when it comes in contact with the user. It's not effective unless it's used."

"Exactly," the rabbi replied. "Exactly."

We have the most powerful agent in the world when it comes to cleansing souls. The word of God provides us with instructions for the proper use of this cleansing agent. It can take any dirty sinner and transform him into a saint. It can scrub away even the worst sins. It can alter us so radically that in Romans 12:2, the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Paul's choice of words includes the term metamorphosis translated transformed. He uses it again in 2 Corinthians 3:18 in the same vein of thought. He wrote, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

From these two texts we gain some very important insights into our walk with God. One thing we learn is that our walk with God is not intended to be a leisurely pleasure stroll in the park. There's serious work to be done and that includes change on our part.

Second, we learn that this change is not cosmetic in nature. It's radical to the point that we are transformed into something else—something other than what we were before the change took place.

Third, we learn that what we are to become is not something of our choosing. We are not to change so that we are identical clones of some religious teacher or mentor. We are to be changed into the likeness or image of Jesus (Romans 8:29).

Fourth, we learn that the transformation is a process. We are being transformed into his likeness with ever–increasing glory. That implies that we need to be patient with each other and with ourselves as God brings about the changes in our lives. God intends for us to change. He has determined that the change is to be radical. He has also resolved that the changes should refurbish us to look more like his Son. All that takes time; it's an ongoing process.

There is no question that God can change lives. The only concern is, will we allow the power of God to come in contact with us and will we continually scrub with it so we can be clean? The soap maker got the point. It's not effective unless it's used.

ONE WAY JESUS

JOHNNY MELTON

Jesus was emphatic: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). One seeking the fellowship and blessing of God the Father must come through Jesus. That is why Peter identified salvation with Jesus. "Salvation is found in no one else," Peter, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, told the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law, "for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Jesus urged His disciples, in His Sermon on the Mount, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13–14).

For centuries these statements have been understood to teach that the exclusive way to God and to salvation is through Jesus Christ. Christians, risking life and fortune, have gone into all the world preaching the gospel, as Jesus himself instructed His disciples (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16), believing that the gospel is God's power to save all who believe, both Jew and Greek (Romans 1:16).

Exclusive Character

However, Jesus' claim that "No one come to the Father except through me," says Lee Strobel, "rankles people like nothing else. It's been called narrow-minded, bigoted, snobbish." And for many, "living in a world where there seem to be endless options in virtually every area of life, this concept is a stumbling block to faith." The idea that Christianity has something to offer that other religions do not has brought condemnation and ridicule from its opponents, and it has brought apology and compromise from some of its adherents.

For example, Stephen Carter, a professor at Yale Law School, has written *The Culture of Unbelief*, a critique of the efforts of intellectual elites to remove any serious discussion of God from our public conversation. His book raises the question, "How did we reach this disturbing pass, when our culture teaches that religion is not to be taken seriously, even by those who profess to believe in it?"

Professor Carter launched his book with a clear statement of his own faith, but then he refused to argue, as Hugh Hewitt puts it, "for a transcendent 'truth' above all other truths...." In fact, the good professor, distances himself from the idea that Christianity contains such "truth." He correctly states the orthodox Christian understanding, but betrays it with a parenthetical note, "The argument runs, only Christians—people who profess a faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior—can achieve eternal life. Many Christians do in fact believe this, citing, for example, John 14:6 as authority. (My own view is that exclusivity of this kind betrays a lack of faith in God's charity, but everyone is entitled to choose a religious belief.)"

Hugh Hewitt, in his book, *The Embarrassed Believer*, responds to Carter's statement: "Professor Carter is a very likable man, a wonderful guest on my show, and I do not doubt the fervor of his own belief. But where Carter, and indeed all of these 'public intellectuals,' have failed the public is in writing books that condemn a moral relativism they themselves are embracing, though in a less obvious way. That's the problem, and it is a large one. Himmelfarb, Fukuyama, Bennett, Carter, and Bork tried to have it both ways. They wanted to scorn moral relativism without explicitly declaring the alternative." (Hewitt, Hugh. *The Embarrassed Believer.* Word Publishing, 1998. P. 152–154)

> *The idea that Christianity has something to offer that other religions do not has brought condemnation and ridicule from its opponents, and it has brought apology and compromise from some of its adherents.*

The alternative is that just as one moral choice is not as viable as every other moral choice, neither is one set of religious beliefs just as viable as every other set of religious beliefs.

The Narrow Way

The following conversation from one of Hewitt's television interviews recognizes the problem that Christians have with teaching the gospel and standing up for Jesus without appearing to be bigoted and narrow-minded.

HUGH HEWITT:

Whenever I have talked about religion with nonbelievers or disbelievers (and I draw a distinction between them), I run into the objection that the narrow gate is a put-off to people. The claim to exclusivity to eternal life or salvation, or whatever tradition calls it, is negative to many people. Is there a narrow gate? In your view, do you have to believe certain things to have eternal life?

ROBERTA HESTENES:

Jesus used the phrase, "the narrow gate." It's not a phrase that someone made up. He talked about the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to salvation. And research polls show that it's more off-putting, in fact, to not know what you believe.

We live in a relativistic and highly tolerant age. But I'm grateful, for instance, for a doctor who told me that I had a tumor and then told me what to do about the tumor. It wasn't good news in the short run, but made a cure possible. Because then I could act on the facts. And Christianity has bad news in it. It says to people, 'Hey, it's possible to go the wrong way. It's possible to screw up your life. It's possible to make decisions that lead to destruction. It's possible to live in such a way that relationships around you are contaminated. It's possible live so selfishly that you not only hurt your self, but you make the world a worse place.' That's bad news when I discover that God has provided a way to put the wrong right, that there is a cure. ...

HUGH HEWITT:

But do Christians have a monopoly on salvation?

ROBERTA HESTENES:

I think that what Scripture says is that Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I believe that. Yes, I believe that.

HUGH HEWITT:

What does that mean for someone watching who isn't a Christian?

ROBERTA HESTENES:

Well, it's a struggle to work it out, to be honest. And it's one of those areas where I have struggled a good bit.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul talks about people who have never heard the Jewish law; and yet God had put a conscience within them, and they were a law unto themselves. And there's more than a suggestion in that Romans language that God is absolutely fair and does not hold people accountable for that which they do not know and are unable to respond to. However, Paul says in Romans, chapter 3, that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Then he says in chapter 6 that "the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." I have to leave it there. I do believe Jesus is the way.

Hewitt concludes, "What all my guests were balancing was not truth versus doubt but the knowledge that a vast audience of nonbelievers was watching them explain these difficult texts. And even a slightly evangelical Christian knows that "narrow gate" exclusivity is a huge and powerful stumbling block to our contemporary culture. This is a culture that has enshrined tolerance, and there is in the claim of Christ's exclusivity an impossible-to-miss eternal intolerance" (Hewitt, p. 179–181).

Conclusion

God help us to remember that ours is not the only culture that has been offended by the gospel. The preaching of the cross was a stumbling block to both the Jews and the Greeks according to I Corinthians 1:23, but the apostle Paul kept right on preaching it. Our task is to preach Jesus, as kindly and as compassionately as possible, but compromising the exclusive character of the gospel must never be allowed to pass for kindness or compassion.

Johnny Melton is a former editor of ***Carolina Christian*** *and now preaches for the Old Aberdeen Rd. church in West Point, MS.*

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SEARCHING DOWN DEAD-END STREETS

RON NEWBERRY

There's a street near my home which borders a cemetery. At the entrance to the street on the corner of the cemetery is a sign that reads "Dead End." I've often mused how this sign speaks volumes about so many lives. The cemetery is but one more dead–end street in their lives.

One of the many unique features that separates humans from animals is our ability to learn from previous generations. We can and should study history so we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We should exercise our innate ability to learn from preceding generations so we can avoid the perils at the end of dead end streets.

Unfortunately we seem to go down the same roads year after year expecting someone to have made an exit. Those of us who preach and counsel have heard the stories so often that we know the script by heart. We just need to plug in the names but the story is the same. How many times have we had a young man or young lady recite to us the story of how they became sexually involved and the heartbreak they now experience? They are used and discarded. They are infected with a sexually transmitted disease. They are pregnant and unmarried.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this lax attitude toward sex is the way we see people who no longer feel shame or equate immoral behavior with sinfulness. It isn't uncommon to talk to someone who has been living in blatant, open, immoral conditions and have them look you in the eye as they say, "I don't see anything wrong with it." The sense of shame has all but vanished.

Appropriate guilt once stood as a sign warning about traveling down certain roads. They were *dead ends*! Guilt and shame are antiquated terms in so much of our culture. How many times has the story of "doing their own thing" which they believed was the road to freedom turned out to be a dead-end street? Drugs have taken a toll on our youth that is unprecedented by any other single self-directed behavior in history. So much of our youth today seems to be constantly in a self-destruct mode.

Many of them find out too late that the words to the old song, "Hotel California" by the Eagles, are true. "You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave." Once again, Satan has conquered another soul. He always promises what he can never deliver and delivers what he never promises. The dead end street sign is often overgrown with satanic weeds blocking the vision of those who are not very cautious in the first place. The downhill street of temptation is a *dead end*!

Unfortunately, lessons learned in youth don't often transfer into adulthood. There's the oft–repeated sad story of a dad who thought real life could be found on the road marked success. He pours his heart into his job. The job soon controls him and eventually depletes his energies. His career drains his soul until he becomes a slave to the very thing that once promised freedom. His addiction to success is as powerful as any drug.

Frequently coupled with that intoxicant called success is the belief that a man's life consists of the things he possesses. As he acquires more and more stuff he finds that the fulfillment and meaning he believed would follow are as elusive as ever. What he wants most—fulfillment, meaning, purpose—eludes him. Relationships suffer.

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His family loses him to the corporation. His church misses his influence. He should have seen the sign when he turned onto that road that was a *dead end*! Then there's the family that invests all their discretionary time and money into recreation. They believe that filling their leisure time on weekends at the beach, in the mountains, camping, and a thousand and one other activities will build a strong family. They have heard that "families that play together, stay together." They travel down a road that promises that if they just spend time together then they will be a hale and hardy family.

While there is some validity to that philosophy, many families forget the one important ingredient necessary to make their family strong. It's not just time together, nor is it even quality time together that makes the difference. What matters is quality and quantity time together building on the only foundation that ultimately matters. Activities together as a family may build a strong family. But unless that building in constructed on a solid foundation of Christian values from God, then the builders build in vain. Once more they hit a *dead end*!

The road map of God's word marks clearly the dead–end streets of life. The wisest man who ever lived explored all the streets we may take. He wrote about his findings, findings that relate directly to the question of meaning, in the book of Ecclesiastes. He tried wisdom, pleasure, work, riches, honor, power. His conclusion in chapter 12 verse 13 is "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

A narrow gate with a straight path marks the only road that is not a dead end street. It is marked as the way of light. Jesus pioneered it. He is the way, the truth and the life. It is not well traveled compared to the broad way that leads to a *dead end*. But it will lead to eternal life.

When I was a child, my mother taught me to pray that childish prayer that has the line, "If I should die before I wake." Those traveling down dead end streets ought to pray to wake before they die. If they do not, they should not be surprised when they come to an eternal dead end!

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THE RELEVANCE OF JESUS TODAY

TOM TORPY

Of what value is Jesus in today's post modern culture? What could an untrained 30 year old Jewish teacher of antiquity teach people today about living on the threshold of the 21st century? Jesus never traveled more than about 100 miles from His home. His learning was limited to the observations that he could make of a rather primitive lifestyle in Roman occupied Galilee and Judea. What could he possibly know that we haven't known for centuries? What could Jesus possibly contribute to our understanding of life and our ability to navigate through its many opportunities and disappointments? How could Jesus possibly relate to the pressures and problems of our overstimulated, undersatisfied populous? How could Jesus even understand our lightning fast, technological 20th century existence, let alone address its needs?

Our post–modern culture seems to be such that we have moved beyond the need for Jesus. Christianity has often given us religious division, religious wars and religious confusion, not to mention the Inquisition and the Crusades. We have witnessed the debunked promises of a weak Christendom. Jesus' religion has been tried and, well, look; American culture is not doing so well. Belief in the Bible produces bigotry and intolerance, especially religious intolerance. Traditional (Judeo–Christian) values have become passé. They cannot accommodate alternate homosexual lifestyles or a woman's choice to give birth or not. In the minds of many Its restrictive and unnecessary moral codes result in Victorian morality in which true human desires are suppressed and perverted. Hollow Christian rituals may have their place in placating troubled spirits, but Christian religion has little value in the post–modern American social fabric.

At least that's one view. But there is another one.

Before we dismiss the founder of the Christian movement as irrelevant, let's give Him a serious look. The fact that Jesus has remained prominent for so long is deserving of consideration to see if He ever did offer anything of value. I believe He did.

Jesus offers us truth. He tells us that we are to look at the world as it is. Image is not everything. Well–crafted cinematography escorts us into innumerable and fascinating illusory realms of entertainment. Feelings have eclipsed facts in explaining physical realities. Most of us relate to a celluloid civilization we perceive through a cathode ray tube. We look to The Weather Channel for information rather than stepping outside. We have just begun to witness the confusion and conflict that results from deception at the highest levels of government. At a time when "honesty is such a lonely word", Jesus admonishes us to address reality. Deception is Satan's. God is not fooled. When everyone's own opinion is "the truth", chaos reigns. Jesus not only tells us the truth, He embodies the truth. He boldly asserts, "I am the truth," and calls people to be seekers of truth. Image, deception, and manipulation have no place in Jesus' system.

Jesus offers us love. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," cannot be improved upon as a basis for interpersonal relationships. Broken marriages, estranged children, and interpersonal battles (not to mention international wars) testify that what the world needs now is love, sweet love; not a melodramatic emotion, but an act of the will that says, "I will do whatever is in your best interest, regardless of what it costs me." It is that kind of self–sacrificial love that took Jesus to the cross and through its torture. People are not in a position to dispense with Jesus or His loving influence. Annually, people motivated by their belief in Jesus freely donate billions of dollars to charitable causes. Great universities, generous benevolent organizations, disaster relief efforts, and leading hospitals, have all been initiated by those who were trying to honor Jesus. Contrast the number of such institutions with those begun and sustained by atheists and their generosity. Every place that Christianity has gone, civilization has advanced and the human condition has improved. Where has atheism been the cause of a better humanity?

Jesus offers us faith. He gives us something higher, bigger, and more important than ourselves. If our own interests only motivate our behaviors, then each individual becomes the most important cause that he or she can serve. When one person's interests limit the pursuits of another, conflict ensues. In such an environment only the strong survive. But mankind was created for something better. We have in us a need for "something to believe in".

Mankind has always prized the pursuit of altruistic ideals. The single mother who works two or three common jobs so as to afford her children education; the soldier who falls on a hand grenade to save his buddies from injury or death; the Don Quixotes who "foolishly" cling with death–like grip to the ideals of nobility, loyalty, truth, and chivalry in the midst of ridicule and unconquerable odds, are among those we honor. India and the world would be poorer if Mother Teresa never existed. Jesus has given us even more. He has raised us above the level of animals who act only on instinct and self–preservation to give us an inherent sense that we are of inestimable value, and so are our fellow earthlings. Thus, each person should be treated as such. Faith in Jesus frees us from competing for existence so we can cooperate in existence.

Jesus offers us hope. He sets before us the prize of the ages, literally. He offers an endless existence permeated with joy and void of pains, fears, hurts, and tears. The sound of a favorite tune that resonates with the listeners' hearts, the eye–tingling beauty of a desert sunset, the complete satisfaction of a difficult task well done, the delicate pleasantness of gourmet cuisine, and the sublime enjoyment of marital sex—all testify that God knows how to create pleasure. And He promises an eternity of it. He who endured the cross and despised shame did so for the joy that was set before him. That joy must be exceedingly good.

Jesus, in His historical setting or any other, brilliantly displays the best mankind can be. And He challenges us to live similarly. When people can afford to eliminate love, when they are ready to erase faith, and they are willing to eradicate hope, only then are we in a position to say that Jesus is irrelevant.

Tom Torpy serves the Jericho Church of Christ in Mocksville, NC. He can be contacted at 113 Junction Road Mocksville, NC 27028.

Jesus and Misha

JOSH PROPST

In Russia military service is the "duty of every man." When young men graduate from their schools they receive notice to report to the military for two years of active duty.

Mikhail Toutiaev (Misha) and his wife, Tanya, are young but strong Christians in Samara, Russia. Misha is on fire with a desire to preach the gospel. he hopes to attend a preaching school soon, and he may even preach in Samara after the American missionaries leave. However, military duty is calling Misha.

Some young men avoid military service through bribes and other dishonest practices. Rather than being scorned, this kind of deceitfulness is often considered prestigious by young Russians. Misha, however, has chosen not to be dishonest. Instead, he hopes to use legal means to be able to carry on the Lord's work without the interruption of military service. The Russian constitution states that young men may be exempt from military duty because of religious convictions.

Misha has been through several courts and lots of red tape in trying to gain his exempt status. He has endured ridicule from his peers and even from a judge and jury who listened to his case. He has been laughed at, ostracized and even threatened. Misha approached one judge with the words, "You are here in this place because God has put you here. Any power you have comes from God." Sound familiar?

As the Roman governor Pilate questioned Jesus, our Master remained silent. "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:9-11).

Misha's charge angered the judge and she replied, "No, I am here because of my own merit, my own power and my own abilities." Misha then told her that what he spoke were the words of the Lord from the Bible. Though the judge had the power to send Misha to prison for what he had said in his attempt to avoid the military, she turned the case over to another judge.

> "Misha's courage touched the judge's heart and now the very same judge who was against Misha is studying the Bible with him."

Misha's courage touched the judge's heart and now the very same judge who was against Misha is studying the Bible with him! Praise God! In addition, the prosecuting attorney has accepted a Bible from Misha and has asked him to pray for her. Our God is an awesome God!

Misha and Tanya, Mitchell and Naomi Propst (my parents, who are also the American missionaries), and the church in Samara have asked for your prayers. Only God knows what the future holds for Misha, the church in Samara and for the Russian people. Jesus' courage before His accusers led to salvation for many. Pray that God will continue to use courageous Misha Toutiaev to lead others to salvation in Christ!

Josh Propst, a native of Shelby, NC, and his wife, Stephanie, are members of the church in Hendersonville, NC. You can contact Josh at 182 Ewart Drive, Hendersonville, NC 28739.

The Sheep and the Goats

(Matthew 25:21-46)

Peter Rode

How do you view the judgment of God at the end of time? I usually picture it as a judicial process. Jesus is holding a court session and the *only* criteria for being found not guilty and being welcomed into the presence of God the Father is whether one's sins have been forgiven by the blood of Christ or not. Having been baptized into Christ, that's no sweat. But, if that's the only way you picture the judgment, beware! This text contains some of the most haunting and unsettling words in Scripture. Nowhere else in Scripture does Jesus make it so absolutely clear that what matters most in the end is how we have demonstrated love and mercy towards others. This is neither a parable nor an allegory. It's a description of the last judgment and the criteria is not who or what you know, but how you have treated people!

Let's take a closer look at the text. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him..." means that this is the end of the age. Human history has ceased. When Jesus comes a great separation takes place. "Sheep" to the right and "goats" to the left. But here is the greatest surprise of all. When asked, "Why?" the answer is "I was hungry...I was thirsty...I was a stranger...I needed clothes...I was sick...I was in prison..." and the "sheep" took are of my needs. "But, but...Lord, when?" And the answer is, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." That's the kicker! We think of Jesus coming, first at His birth and second, at the end of the age. I would suggest that perhaps He spends some time with His church between these "comings." In this text He is depicted as being amongst the least of humanity. Those whom we try to avoid—the scum, the dregs of society, the untouchables, the undesirables. That's where Jesus is! And every time we show love and mercy towards them, Jesus says we do it to Him!

> "In this text He is pictured as being among the least in humanity."

In other words, the sheep were not aware that they were doing it as service to the Lord. Their service was not motivated out of selfish greed to see what was in it for them; rather, it was because they had been transformed by Jesus. We sometimes need to be reminded that Jesus calls us to serve, and not just because He commands it and gave us an example to do so, but because serving makes us more like Him. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:5-11).

Peter Rode serves the Friendly Ave. church in Greensboro, NC. He can be contacted at 5101 W. Friendly Ave., Greensboro, NC 27410.

Growing in Faith

MARK HUDSON

Too often we assume that a person's belief in and understanding of God should be immediate and complete. Many of us would deny that, but our frustration and impatience with others says otherwise. In reality, people must grow in faith and knowledge. In Daniel chapters one through four, King Nebuchadnezzar had a series of life experiences that educated him about the one true God. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, demonstrates a faith that grew to maturity.

> "His journey to a mature faith took time and he suffered many setbacks, but it proved to be a journey worth taking."

Nebuchadnezzar's army laid siege against Jerusalem. Not only did they loot the vessels from the house of God, but they carried off the best and brightest young men of Judah. Among the captives were Daniel and his three friends, better known by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Chapter two explains how Daniel was able to reveal and interpret the king's dream when all the Chaldean magicians, conjurers and sorcerers had failed. Daniel boldly proclaimed, "there is a God in heaven" (Daniel 2:28). Nebuchadnezzar faced the existence of God for the first time, but he still thought of Daniel's God as one of many (2:47). It wasn't until the end of chapter three that the king began to fear God.

Nebuchadnezzar made a 90 foot tall statue of gold and ordered his subjects to worship it. Daniel's three friends refused to bow to the idol and suffered the king's reprisals. They were sentenced to die in the furnace, but God delivered them. Miraculously, they were uninjured by the flames. Their hair was not singed, neither did their clothes smell of smoke when they walked out of the furnace. Although the king was still believed in many gods, he gained a profound respect for the "God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego." Nebuchadnezzar decreed death for anyone speaking a word against God (3:29).

Chapter four opens with the king singing the praises of God. Daniel interpreted yet another dream for the king; this time about a great tree that had been chopped down. This dream served as a warning to repent (4:27). Unfortunately, he forgot to honor God. Twelve months after the dream he exalted himself saying, "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" (4:30). True to God's word, Nebuchadnezzar was humbled. He was driven away from civilization, covered with hair, and lived like a wild beast. Eventually, he returned to his senses and gave glory and honor to God.

Chapter four and Nebuchadnezzar's life both ended with the king following God. Notice how different was his final profession of faith: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways are just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (4:37). His journey to a mature faith took time and he suffered many setbacks, but it proved to be a journey worth taking. May the king's example give us hope and courage today as we all journey toward a more mature faith.

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Free at Last

STEPHEN J. WALLS-MATHIS

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release of the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor." (Isaiah 61:1-3)

> "JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO BRING RELEASE, SIGHT AND HOPE TO THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, BLIND, DESPERATE."

Monday, January 18, has been designated as a National Holiday—the Post Office, the banks, and the schools will all be closed to provide a time of reflection and remembrance, to commemorate the life and work of an Americana hero and legend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King dedicated his life to the cause of civil rights, fueled by his dedication to God and the gospel. He is a hero, yes, but he was also a man, with faults and pride, hopes and dreams. And oh, what dreams!

He dreamed of a land free from the burden of racism and bigotry. He longed to sing the words of that old spiritual, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I am free at last." More than thirty years have passed since he spoke of his dream in Washington, and the nation is still burdened. We still have work to do, but there is hope. We can still dream.

Is it just a dream? Is it just a song? No, I think there's more to it than that. The songs we call spirituals came to life among the African American slaves. It was in their songs the slaves held onto their dreams and their identity, as they called out to God, who often seemed to bless only the rich, white masters. They are songs filled with longing, offering hope and comfort. They paint a picture of a world free of slavery and oppression, a world filled with joy and peace. They were drawn from the persistent theme of the Bible: no matter how bad things look in this life, we serve a God who will set His people free, who will triumph in the end, who will bring His people home.

We serve a God who cares for the oppressed, who cares for the downcast, who cares for the weak, the poor, the outcasts. Jesus came into this world to bring release, sight, and hope to those who are oppressed, blind, desperate. He tells us that this world is not all there is. The real world has yet to come. One day soon, the chariot will swing low and carry us home.

That news gives us hope in the face of trial, trouble and doubt. It's more than a dream. We call it Gospel, and it makes me feel like singing,

Free at last, free at last,
Thank God Almighty,
I am free at last.

Stephen J. Walls–Mathis ministers to the Schnectady Church of Christ. He can be contacted at 2042 Balltown Rd., Schenectady, NY 12309.

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